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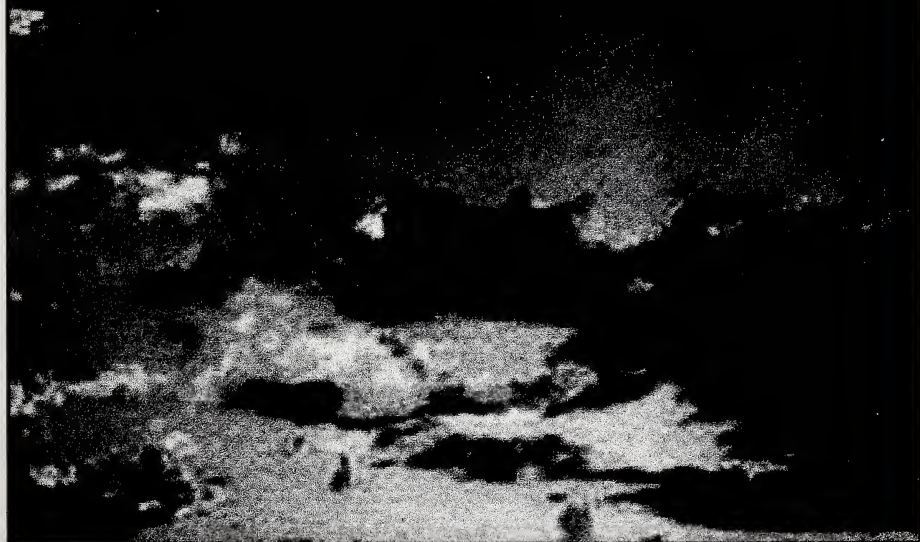
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CAROLINA

christian

*"Because of the LORD's great love
we are not consumed,
for His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness."*

— Lamentations 3:22-23



CAROLINA christian

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Special Anniversary, A Special Church

DENNIS CONNER

In more than three years of writing for this column, I can recall only one time that I used the space to deal with personal matters, and that was at the end of my first year as editor of *Carolina Christian*. I beg the indulgence of our readers as I do so for a second time. Hopefully, prayerfully, you will think neither the time nor the space to have been wasted.

By time you receive this issue, the Yadkinville church of Christ will have celebrated its twentieth anniversary, having begun on January 21, 1979 as an outreach effort of the Warners Chapel church in Clemmons, NC. I have had the joy and honor of preaching for the Yadkinville church all of its twenty years. That is certainly more of a tribute to the congregation than it is to me. It's not a large church, but it's a great church and my wife and I love it dearly. Allow me, please, to share with you a few reasons as to why it is in my estimation a great church, and consequently why Terre and I love it so much.

First, it is truly a family. Many people mistakenly assume that smallness virtually guarantees a sense of family seldom experienced by larger churches, but that is not necessarily true. There are as many small churches that are divided and fractured as there are larger churches. Shallow relationships are just as common to small churches as they are to larger churches as well. The Yadkinville congregation, however, is as healthy a church family as any I know of. Not a perfect family, mind you, but a healthy family. There is a genuine care for one another as members rejoice, cry, laugh, and suffer with one another. When needs arise, spiritual or material, everything possible is done to meet them.

When disagreements between fellow believers

occur (and they do, as they would in any family), reconciliation is sought through loving confrontation, dialogue and prayer. Getting along with one another is taken seriously. "Brother" and "sister" are more than titles.

Second, it practices a Christlike love. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). The Yadkinville church believes that love is to be the distinctive mark of Jesus' church and is wholeheartedly devoted to actively fulfilling that calling. Guests to our assemblies consistently remark that the thing they notice first about the church is the way the members obviously love one another. I often tell people, "There are a lot of things, a lot of programs, we can't offer you. However, there is one thing we can offer you, and that is the opportunity to be loved like you have never been loved before." And the church strives to love the kinds of people Jesus loved: the displaced, those rejected by society and by other churches in our county, those looked down upon by polite society, those with seriously messed up lives, and respectable folks who nevertheless know that they are sinners. In other words, anyone who is open to Jesus. Consequently, ours is a diverse fellowship made up of people recovering from and struggling with various addictions to folks living at or below the poverty level to the upper middle class. We like to think of our congregation as the kind of place where both Jesus and sinners would feel at home.

Third, it is a church that hungers for truth. The congregation realizes that there is a sense in which God's truth is never fully realized in this life. His word is so vast and so deep that its width will never be completely traversed and its depths will never be fully plumbed. Thus, the church is not content with the status quo; rather, we have not yet arrived. Further, the truth of biblical traditions is valued over the encrusting tendencies of human traditions. My brothers and sisters are willing to follow wherever the truth of God leads.

Fourth, it is willing to love and forbear its all too human preacher. My family and I are not held to one standard while the rest of the church practices another. They love me for (and often in spite of) who I am, they love and accept my wife for who she is, and they love my son for who he is. My brothers and sisters allow my family and me to be human, allowing us to share our lives with them. A few months ago we experienced a crisis in our family. At a moment's notice several disciples met with us at the church building to pray with and

for us. They poured out their hearts for us in prayer, cried with us, and then held and loved us. I know many preachers who would give anything for such a church, and I know as well how blessed I am.

Finally, it is a praying church. Prayer is a priority with this congregation. Every other Wednesday night is devoted to corporate prayer. It is not uncommon for a number of folks to stay after a service is over in order to pray with or for someone, or to get together before a service in order to pray. When people come together socially in homes it often happens that they end up praying together. It is a church that truly believes that there is power in prayer.

Well, to be honest, these are just a few of the reasons the Yadkinville church holds such a special place in my heart. There is so much more I could share with you, but there just isn't the space.

Through the years folks in my extended family and others have wondered why I haven't "moved on up the ladder." To tell you the truth, I believe I'm already standing on the top rung.

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What Does the Future Hold?

a new year with great possibilities has arrived! Depending on who you talk to 1999 will be a wonderful year of discovery and fulfillment or a year of disaster and failures. The simple fact is no one knows what the future holds for our nation or our world. To illustrate, consider the following predictions:

RON NEWBERRY

the Advanced Computing Systems Division of IBM, 1968, commenting on the microchip).

"This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us." (Western Union internal memo, 1876).

"Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible." (Lord Kelvin, president, Royal Society, 1895).

"Everything that can be invented has been invented." (Charles H. Duell, Commissioner, U.S. Office of Patents, 1899).

"The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?" (David Sarnoff's associates in response to his urgings for investment in the radio in the 1920s).

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." (Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943).

"Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons." (*Popular Mechanics*, forecasting the relentless march of science, 1949).

"We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." (Decca Recording Co. rejecting the Beatles, 1962).

"But what is it good for?" (Engineer at

"Man will never reach the moon regardless of all future scientific advances." (Dr. Lee De Forest, inventor of the vacuum tube and father of television).

Every year a plethora of prognosticators predict dire consequences for the economy and the environment if certain steps are not taken to rectify the problems. However, the economy keeps on humming and the environment sustains life.

Every year some "seer" in the church predicts dreadful repercussion for the church if certain steps are not taken to promote this or that point of view, unless this or that church is not censured, if this or that brother is not branded as a false teacher. Most of those predictions forecasting such shocking results can be dumped into the waste basket with the predictions about homes not having computers and the inability to put a man on the moon.

That doesn't mean that we can grow complacent about the church. It doesn't mean that we can become lazy in protecting her against heresy. We must remain vigilant against any threat to the peace, serenity and purity of the church. However, we must not get caught up in the fanaticism that seems to produce new Messiahs for the church in each generation.

The key to remaining sound without yielding to the predictions of doomsayers is profoundly simple. In a word, it is faith. We must have faith in each other, believing that each of us has as much love for the church as the rest of us. We must have faith that God will continue to stay in control of his

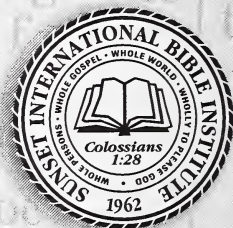
church. We must have faith that the next generation will be as dedicated to the pursuit of truth as we are. We must have faith that men and women with good hearts and pure motives can differ without dividing. We must have faith that perfection in every disputable matter is neither demanded nor even possible. We must have faith that we are all saved by grace.

In the final analysis, the only predictions about the future of the church that I want to rely on are those made in Scripture. In Matthew 15:18, Jesus said that the gates of Hades will not overcome the church. In Ephesians 3:10, the apostle Paul states that it was God's intent that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. The church will continue to function as the body of Christ

who is the head (Colossians 1:18). One day we will sing a new song before the throne because we have been redeemed from the earth (Revelation 14:3).

Yes, there are those like Chicken Little who assert that the sky is falling, or the little boy in the old story who cry wolf once too often. Vigilance should always be maintained. We certainly should keep an eye on those who would cause division and put obstacles in our way (Romans 16:17). Wolves masquerading as sheep should be identified (Matthew 7:15). We should all do our part to keep the church headed in the right direction. Yet in the final analysis, we should have confidence in God's ability to take care of his church. As the old adage says, "We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future."

Prepare to Preach God's Word.



Acts 20:27

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Popularity's Short Shelf Life

Mauseous. And stupid. That's the way Charlie felt after living his fantasy for months. The big warehouse store was overstocked with Charlie's favorite Super Duper Double-Dipped Chocolate Chip Sugar Bombs, and they were all marked with dates that were soon to expire. Charlie's dream came true when the store put the snacks on clearance, selling whole cases for a dollar each. Like any smart college kid, Charlie loaded up, buying enough to fill one of his closets.

He started the day with a good dose of Sugar Bombs. He endured his boring afternoon classes by gorging on Sugar Bombs at lunch. Nothing soothed him after a hard day's work like a dozen Sugar Bombs. For a while, anyway.

Then eating Sugar Bombs got old. And they got old, gooey and weird tasting. But how could he quit eating them? This was his dream. Besides, he had spent all that money on them. What if his parents found out that he had spent a small fortune on Sugar Bombs and then thrown half of them away?

Super Duper Double-Dipped Chocolate Chip Sugar Bombs are a lot like popularity. Everyone dreams of having it, but it gets old and soon makes people wonder why they ever started chasing it.

Acts 14:8-20 tells of the time when Paul and Barnabas went to the town of Lystra to tell people about Jesus. When Paul brought God's healing power to a man who had been crippled since birth, popularity fell into his lap by the truckload.

The crowd that witnessed the feat was sure that the gods Zeus and Hermes had come in the human forms of Paul and Barnabas. They didn't merely think they were cool guys; they called them gods! How much more popular could you get!

When the people of Lystra began to treat the two missionaries like gods, Barnabas and Paul realized what was going on. They ripped their clothes and rushed into the crowd, calling on them to give the glory to the true God. "Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the

DANNY BOGGS

crowd from sacrificing to them" (v. 18).

Why did Paul and Barnabas want to terminate every adolescent's dream? Popularity was not their pursuit. Instead, three other realities gripped their lives.

First, no matter how great we are, God is greater. He is the "Great I Am." God gave us every gift, talent, and ability that we have. Humbly, then, we should serve Him.

Second, who we are does not depend on what other people think of us. Any "normal" person would have basked in the glow of a whole town exalting him above all else, but Paul and Barnabas didn't rely on the acceptance of their peers for their self-esteem. The good news they were preaching told them that the Almighty God loved them enough to sacrifice His own Son for all of the fatal mistakes they had made. They didn't need people to cheer their successes and offer them ignorant animals to make them feel good about themselves.

Third, Paul and Barnabas were aware that the tide of popular opinion can turn on you quick. And it did! "Then some of the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead." Who needs enemies with friends like these!

Had popularity been Paul's quest, the story probably would have ended there. The sweet taste of public approval had quickly soured. But, as he later said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Paul did not let go of God, and God did not let Paul down. The story continues, "But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe" (Acts 14:8-20). Life went on.

You are popular with the One who wants to reward you with a life that never expires. Bring glory to God; He plans to bring you to glory (Hebrews 2:10)!

Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791, or by e-mail at: dannyboggs@juno.com.

Trusting God.....

In Mark 4:26-29 Jesus gives a short description of how God works, sort of. "And He was saying, 'The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know. The soil produces the crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the

■
"Mark's gospel clearly suggests that the appropriate response to God is faith."
■

sickle, because the harvest has come.' " He says the kingdom (rule, reign) of God is like when a seed is planted and it grows, regardless of what the farmer does or knows. Eventually, the farmer will benefit from this process, but

the power of growth is not his.

Obviously, the farmer has a part; he plants and reaps. He probably planned, fertilized, weeded and shooed the birds away. It would be unfair to say he did nothing, but the power to make it grow is not in him. How God works is not open to inspection. Maybe Jesus is not telling us how God works, just that He does. The kingdom comes. It does.

What is our place in the work of God? There are things we are to do: go, tell, pray, trust, organize, confess, study, administer, and other important tasks. And we are to do them well, as the many books and workshops these days encourage us. And you know what? The well-crafted program *will* get the job done. The extra effort *will* turn the tide in our favor. The strength of self-control *will* make the difference between success and failure. So it seems. So it appears.

AMOS ALLEN

So, our part is sometimes hard to figure out. We are to

give our best, but trust God to do His part. And regardless of my efforts (be they good or bad), He determines the outcome. Is that what the parable is saying?

Maybe our approach is to be this: do what we can, remember that God has His purposes (which are beyond our comprehension), don't get too high or too low, and just see what happens. That viewpoint doesn't match up well with how Jesus lived, or others who knew Him well. I am not sure I like God being so mysterious. I mean, what's the point of keeping so much hidden? I'm starting to have a hard time with this parable.

Or could it be that the parable is not trying to answer every question I might have about God's involvement in this world? Maybe trusting God is what I am left with. I often think, "If I just knew..." But insight is not the key that opens the door behind which God hides. Mark's gospel clearly suggests that the appropriate response to God is faith. Our culture stresses knowledge, hard work and perception as key ingredients for success. Jesus is not against these, but they are not primary; not where we start. We begin with faith, and we never outgrow it.

And what if this parable is for our reassurance? Yes, God does work. The kingdom does grow. My best cannot change others, but God can. We learn to give it our best, knowing all the time that God is working and is glad to work with us. We benefit even when we don't do the real, unseen work.

We are not alone in this world or in our efforts to make a difference. May the kingdom of God continue to come and to grow.

Amos Allen preaches for the Meadowbrook Rd. church in Asheboro, NC. He can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

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The Spirit of the Age and the Spirit of God

 In Galatians 4:4 Paul writes of how God sent forth His Son in "the fullness of time." Jesus' entry into the world came at precisely the right time. Not only were conditions right from a prophetic standpoint, but they were also right in regard to the conditions that exist in the secular world. It was the time of the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) in which relatively safe travel was possible on roads and water ways protected by Roman rule. The influence of the Greek culture had provided a common language with a preciseness that served well as a means of communicating God's will in written form. The Greco-Roman culture provided an interest in learning that resulted in fertile minds for the planting of the gospel.

I mention this in order to make the point that the spread of the gospel in the first century was advanced by both the spirit of the age and the Spirit of God. Throughout church history we have seen times when the spirit of the age served to advance the spread of the gospel (it is no accident that the Renaissance and the Reformation occupy the same historical time period). Our own Restoration Movement was the beneficiary of the spirit of the age in which it prospered—an age which was characterized by a focus on reason, individualism, freedom and constitutionalism. The growth and expansion of the church throughout America in the 1950's and 1960's can be attributed in part to political and economic realities coupled with evangelistic emphasis.

The opposite point can also be made. There have been times throughout history in which the spirit of the age worked against the advancement of the cause of

PAUL JARRETT

Christ. The most notable example of this is the

apostasy that occurred as the church developed into a political institution to fill the political vacuum that resulted from the break-up of the Roman Empire. In our own history the division that occurred among churches of Christ in the years following the Civil War may be attributed in no small measure to the political and economic impact the war had on the church. The political and social unrest of the 60's and 70's impacted the church, as has the growing secularism of the 80's and 90's.

If the church is to survive and thrive, we need to be conscious of both the will of the Spirit and the influence of the spirit of the age in which we are living. The spirit of the age can be either favorable or unfavorable to the growth and well-being of the church. The impact that this secular spirit has on us may be compared to the impact that the wind has on a sailboat. While all of us are at the mercy of the wind to some degree, a good sailor who is skilled at tacking (bringing a sailboat into the wind to change the course of the vessel) can avoid many problems and use the wind to his advantage. Our commitment to the Spirit of God can keep us from running aground (Ephesians 4:14), but in order to succeed we need to also know how to handle the spirit of the age.

There are three characteristics of the spirit of our present age which can bode well for the future of the church if properly utilized. They are: (1) craving for meaning that is leading many people to look to the church as a place where their needs may be met, (2) a desire for community ahead of religious form as witnessed to by the decline in membership in mainline denomi-

nations, and the increase in the number and size of the community churches, and (3) the dawning of a new millennium brings with it both apprehension and anticipation. The approaching millennium is especially significant to those who see it as the dawning of the seventh millennium and the start of a thousand years of peace under the reign of Christ on earth.

These three characteristics of the spirit of our age can be used to advance the cause of Christ if we are careful to avoid the following mistakes.

First, we need to avoid the temptation to swell the ranks of our congregations by simply catering to the felt needs of the world. It is never wrong to meet peoples' felt needs (Jesus fed the multitudes and ministered to many other felt needs). However, it is wrong if we fail to help people to understand that their real needs are only going to be met when the experience the joy of living a life focused on meeting the needs of others through Christ. The way of the cross is the way of self-denial and self-sacrifice in every age.

Second, we need to examine our own view of the church to determine if we are truly the kind of community of believers that many in our age are seeking, or are we in danger of becoming the traditional denomination that many are fleeing. It is a sad reality that at a time when you would think our plea for undenominational Christianity would be well received, we are in a state of decline in many places because many people perceive us as being the very thing we supposedly oppose.

Finally, we are in position to take the lead in proclaiming the reign of Christ and the ushering in of a new millennium if we can separate the truth taught in Scripture

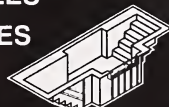
from the false speculations and theories of dispensational millennialism (the doctrine of a literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth). There is a strong evangelistic zeal that accompanies millennial views. For instance, Alexander Campbell (an extremely influential preacher and writer in the developing years of the Restoration Movement) was motivated at least in part by his conviction that the ultimate end of his work of uniting all Christians by means of the restoration of the ancient order would be the ushering in of a millennium of peace under the influence the church would have on mankind. We must not fail to see the approaching millennium as an opportunity to make a real difference in the world and age in which we live. We have the message, the gospel of peace. We have the opportunity. Will we have the zeal?

If we can properly channel the spirit of our age, I truly believe that the cause of Christ can experience unparalleled growth in the coming millennium.

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples FL, 37102, or by e-mail at: pejarrett@juno.com.

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On Church Attendance.....

R

oseto,
Pennsylvania,
was founded in 1882 by
immigrants from southern

Italy. Until the 1960s
this community was
"full of three-genera-
tion households with
strong commitments to
church and family."

Prior to the erosion of
those traditions, the
citizens of Roseto,
according to the March
16, 1998 issue of
Newsweek, enjoyed a
significantly lower
death rate due to heart
attacks than folks in
neighboring communi-
ties. This phenomenon,
called the "Roseto

effect," has been attributed to the
communities's "tightknit social life." As
Roseto's commitments to church and
family deteriorated, so did its health.

Dr. Dean Ornish writes in *Love and
Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing
Power of Intimacy*, "Love and intimacy are
at the root of what makes us sick and
what makes us well. I am not aware of
any other factor in medicine—not diet,
not smoking, not exercise—that has a
greater impact." Research continues to
validate Ornish's argument that people
who live as isolated individuals have a
greater susceptibility to "everything from
cancer and heart disease to ulcers and
infections."

One landmark study, begun in 1965,
followed 4,700 residents of Alameda
County, California for ten years. This

JOHNNY MELTON

study, showing that people
who reported the least
amount of social interaction died at nearly
three times the rate of those who

reported the most,
suggested that the
source of the social
interaction didn't
matter. The critical
factor was time spent
with others. However,
more recent studies,
while supporting the
thesis that social
interaction contrib-
utes to good health,
indicate the nature of
the intimacy does
matter. Gerald L.
Zelizer, a member of
USA Today's board of
contributors, says the

"As Roseto's
commitments
to church and
family
deteriorated,
so did its
health."

more one prays, the healthier one will be.
He cites two recent studies suggesting a
correlation between greater attendance at
religious services and increased physical
health and longevity.

The first study, released by Duke
University Medical Center in October
1997, found that the elderly who attend
worship services regularly are less likely
to have some cancers, auto-immune
disorders and certain viral diseases. The
second study, conducted by researchers at
Yale and Rutgers Universities and reported
last November, followed 2,912 senior
citizens over a twelve-year period. It
found that attendance at services among
New Haven's elderly meant more robust
mental health. People in the study tended
to avoid bad habits like smoking and
drinking. Even the chronically ill have

"increased feelings of optimism and fewer symptoms of depression" than those who don't attend worship assemblies. The statistics correlating more prayer with longer life are clear, but *why* is there a connection? It wasn't just that healthier people attended services more often: many participants in both studies had severe disabilities.

Dr. Harold Koenig, author of the Duke study, suggests a possible cause. The immune function may be enhanced because of "feelings of togetherness, even, perhaps the experience of worship and adoration." The Rutgers study was even more suggestive. It found that "there was evidence that attendance at religious services had a positive impact on health even after other variables such as friendship, leisure activities and social support were removed."

Church is where God intends for us to find love and encouragement. Faithful attendance, according to these studies, may promote good physical health, but God promises that it will promote sound spiritual health which is even more vital. *"Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:23-25, NRSV).

See you at worship—for your health!

Johnny Melton preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS. He can be contacted at 751 E. Westbrook St., West Point, MS 39773.

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Shepherds Without Blemish

STANLEY N. HELTON

In his instruction to the missionary (or apostolic delegate) to the island of Crete, Paul informed Titus to appoint elders in every city. The foremost quality for these leaders is that they be "blameless." But what does "blamelessness" mean in the context of church leadership? A sketch of the context of the letter to Titus provides the background for the reason Paul sought this particular quality in an elder.

The Literary Context of the Letter to Titus

Paul states his purpose for writing the letter in 1.5, where he (re)assigns Titus two tasks: (1) to set unfinished things in order and (2) to appoint leaders in every city. The rest of the first chapter elaborates on the second of these tasks. In 1.6-9, Paul enumerates the qualities needed for leadership in Crete. The last quality in v. 9, "to refute those who contradict," prepares the reader for Paul's assessment of Cretan society.

The populace of Crete lacked moral character, which the apostle supports by quoting Epimenides, a Cretan poet, who lived in the sixth century BC. Additionally Titus must deal with "those of the circumcision" (see Acts 10:45 and 11:2; cf. also Col. 10, 11), a Jewish element exploiting the church by "ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach," and making a profit in the process (v. 12). The severity of the situation in Crete should not be minimized; it is the seriousness of the situation in Crete that called this letter into being, and forms the backdrop for understanding the qualities required of elders.

In chapter two, the apostle expands on

the first of the two tasks ("to straighten out what

was left unfinished") mentioned in 1.5. In 2.1 Paul encourages Titus to teach "what is in accord with healthy teaching." What "healthy teaching" entails follows. In 2.2, Titus is to teach the older men, in v. 3, the older women, who themselves are to teach the younger women (vv. 4, 5). Why is Titus not to teach the younger women? The text gives no direct reason, but if homes are being disrupted and the reputation of the Christian community is at stake, the suggestion is appropriate. In this way, Titus himself will model blamelessness.

Titus is to teach the young men (vv. 6-8) and slaves (vv. 9, 10). The ethical behavior sought for each group finds its biblical foundation in the appearance of God in Christ (vv. 11-14). The single goal of these ethical demands are strategically placed in the "so that" clauses of vv. 5, 8, and 10:

v. 5 *so that no one will malign the word of God*

v. 8 *so that those who oppose may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

v. 10 *so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive (NIV).*

The common denominator here is that these ethical instructions are to have a profound effect on those outside the church: it has to do with, what we call today, public relations and image. Again this backdrop shapes Paul's understanding of "blameless."

In 3:1-2 Paul continues his ethical exhortation, but the focus now shifts from relationships within the household and

church to relationship of the church to society. In 3:3-8, almost as a reminder that Titus must continue to have compassion on Cretan society, Paul recalls that they too were once outside of fellowship with God, but now God had changed this when he saved them, implying that he could do the same for depraved Cretans. The apostle finally returns to the problems described in 1:10-16, telling Titus to avoid such things (3:9-11). Final greetings fill 3:12-15, but in v. 14 we see that the apostle could not dislodge from his mind the gravity of the moral problems in Crete.

The Meaning and Use of "Blameless"

This brief overview invites a couple of observations regarding the word "blameless" and its function in Titus. The ethical state of the inhabitants of Crete is the opposite for what Paul is looking for in leaders for the church. This may suggest to Titus that finding good leaders may be difficult in that mission field but also critical.

The word itself comes from the Hellenistic legal arena. It literally means "unaccused" and "indicates one whose character and conduct has not been called into question, or one who is free from accusation." (Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, second edition [Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1988], 171).

Wehrisch offers, "The other adjectives used in this context indicate that the meaning is beyond reproach, in the ordinary sense of common respectability. Thus in addition to qualifications of a spiritual nature, ordinary standards of decency are made into a preconditions of office in the church, for the sake of the

church's good name in the world." (Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], s.v. "Blameless" by H. Wehrisch).

In Titus, "blameless" occurs at the top of the list of qualifications or qualities Paul required in church leaders and seems to be the premier quality explained by those that follow in the list. V. 7 offers a theological rationale: the elder serves as God's steward, God's household manager. As such, he and the other elders represent God. They serve as God's ambassadors to the church and the world (see v. 9).

Implications for Leadership Today

Blamelessness is closely related to integrity. J. Robert Clinton defines integrity as "that uncompromising adherence to a code of moral, artistic, and other values that reveals itself in sincerity, honesty, and candor and avoids deception and artificiality." (J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988], 58.) However, integrity is an internal quality while "blameless" has an external quality about it. It is what others think of an elder. There can be no charge brought against him, not just in his public life, but in his private as well. It is concern with not just what the church sees, but what the world sees.

When blameless, no one can bring a charge against God's household manager!

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Prepare the Way of the Lord: Part One.....

“a

voice of one calling
in the desert,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in, every
mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become
straight, the rough ways smooth.

And all mankind will see God’s
salvation.’ ” (Luke 3:4-6, NIV)

John the Baptist is someone I admire
and look up to. I like his style, his ability to
cut to the heart. He stands out like a
Rambo of the New Testament. Wild.
Independent. Unpredictable. Unwavering.
Standing on the edge of the promised land,
pointing the way to the “dawn from on
high,” John has a significant role to play in
God’s plan.

John was one of the most popular men
of his day. Why did the crowds flock to
hear him? I believe it was his willingness to
tell the truth without apology. In a day of
darkness, confusion and longing, John’s
message was clear and succinct. He didn’t
pull any punches, but instead spoke right to
the heart, clearing away all the rubbish, all
the clutter that stands between us and God.
John could look at the crowd—look at
us—and see lives filled with junk; all the
valleys of hopelessness we have dug for
ourselves, all the mountains of busyness
and we’ve piled in front of us, obscuring
our view of God. He could see the endless
toil of our days as we try to do it all on our
own. And from the wilderness he cries out,
“Enough!”

“Change the way you’re living.
Repent of your idolatry of self. Lay
down the burdens of your heart and
soul. Share what you have with
others. Be content. Live for God.

STEPHEN MATHIS

Get rid of all that
endless clutter and

find the straight path God has made.
God is making all things new, so get
ready. His wrath is coming, but you
have nothing to fear if you are
prepared!”

That was John’s mission, to prepare the
way for the Lord, to announce to the world,
and to us, that God was breaking in on
history, making a claim on our lives. God’s
tender mercy is coming to life, intended for
all people. John came to point the way to
salvation. “I baptize you with water. But one
more powerful than I will come...He will
baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with
fire” (Luke 3:16).

One more powerful? You mean there’s
more? Who could it be? What is God
planning?

This message of preparation creates a
feeling of expectation. John offers an
invitation to enter into God’s path, to be
caught up in something new, something
marvelous, something good. The old world
is fading away. Turn your life to God and
enter into the new age, the age of the
gospel; enter into God’s grip of grace and
let your life be transformed. This is God’s
message of hope to all people.

Luke will spend the entire gospel giving
us an insight into this message of hope and
pointing out the implications of the
message. The Gospel lays an exclusive claim
on our lives. We are called to live with
integrity each day.

It is not enough just to believe the
message in our heads. The gospel is not like
high school chemistry where you memorize
and cram for the exam, and then forget
everything. The gospel calls for a change in

(continued on next page)

Being Themselves

In a multitude of biblical characters we see the actions of people who have become famous for their acts of faith and integrity. Yet, they did not set out to be famous. They were not making a show of their spiritual strength. Rather, they were just doing what they were supposed to do. Their actions simply demonstrated their everyday faith.

For instance, at a young age, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. When he reached Egypt he could easily have adopted Egyptian morals, but he chose not to. He refused to be seduced. No one was watching when Potipher's wife approached him repeatedly, but Joseph steadfastly resisted the temptations. He wasn't out to prove anything to anyone. Joseph didn't resist temptation to show the world how strong his self-discipline was. He just did what was right because it was right.

Ruth did not have an audience to which she could deliver her lines "wherever you go," pledging her loyalty to Naomi. There was no boisterous applause from an admiring multitude. Ruth simply acted like

TOM TORPY

Ruth, with love looking beyond her own needs to those of her mother-in-law. And she did so quietly and alone.

Daniel had no impression of being an example for the God-fearing world when he and his friends refused to eat "unclean" food. They did so simply because it was right.

We may note an important lesson from these people of faith: the accumulation of many little decisions can affect our lives more than our major decisions. How many big New Year's resolutions have been broken by little daily habits? And how many defining moments in a life have come as a consequence of doing the right thing day in and day out? Daniel, Ruth, and Joseph were in the habit of making right decisions all the time.

In other words, they were just being themselves.

Tom Torpy preaches for the Jericho church in Mocksville, NC. He can be contacted at PO Box 354, Mocksville, NC 27208.

(continued from previous page)

your life, a transformation; we enter into a new life. Our salvation in one sense is not some one time event, but an ongoing process as we are shaped by God into His image. We are called to a repentance that is sustained and ongoing. John calls us to recognize that our lives have been caught up in the life changing, soul saving work of God. We cannot go on living like we have been; we cannot pretend that God's message makes no difference. We are now marked by the Spirit of God, having died to the old

world of sin and self, raised to a new life in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God now lives in us as a sign of our faith. The Spirit lives in us, having made a claim on our lives, on how we live each day.

Are we prepared for this good news?

Stephen J. Walls—Mathis ministers to the Schnectady Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

PEARL RIVER, LA...

The devastation caused in the Central American region by Hurricane Mitch will not be easily recovered from. Help will be needed for a long time to come. Mision del Caribe is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting mission work in the Caribbean region. For the present time it has dedicated all of its resources to a relief effort in Honduras. Individuals or congregations that would like to assist in this effort may contact: Mision del Caribe, P.O. Box 490, Pearl River, LA; phone (504) 863-5345, (504) 643-4386 or (504) 643-4384. Other disaster relief programs are currently underway as well to ease the suffering of the people of Honduras and Nicaragua, including four efforts being directed by members of churches of Christ. Information regarding these efforts can be found on the internet at:
<http://www.actionboard.com/assist/mdc.htm>

<http://www.wfrchurch.org/relief/infotframe.htm>

<http://www.hhi-aid.org>

<http://www.mtgroup.com/lewisbd/relief>

Check out these sites if you are interested in helping. (*The disaster relief website information appeared in the bulletin of the Lexington Church of Christ in Lexington, SC.*)

CLEMSON, SC...

The Clemson church of Christ will host the first ever Father/Son Retreat at Palmetto Bible Camp on April 23-24, 1999. They are recruiting instructors for activities like archery, fly-fishing, target shooting. If you have a

skill to teach, or if you would like to help by leading singing or a devotional, please contact Alan Watson at (864) 654-3583 or e mail: Watsonal@juno.com.

HENDERSON, TN...

The annual Bible Lectureship at Freed-Hardeman University will be conducted February 7-12. The theme this year is "Hearing God's Voice: Proverbs at the Millenium." For more information call David Lipe at (901) 989-6653.

ABILENE, TX...

Abilene Christian University will conduct its annual lectureship February 21-24. The theme will be "Behold, He Comes!" Contact Bill Young for more information at (915) 674-3750.

KNOXVILLE, TN...

"Practical Christianity" is the theme of the East Tennessee School of Preaching lectureship, March 7-10. For more information call the school office at (423) 691-7444.

YADKINVILLE, NC...

The Yadkinville Church of Christ celebrated its 20th anniversary on January 17, 1999, with a special service. The church also announces that the dates for the annual Small Church Workshop will be May 20-21, 1999.

MOCKSVILLE, NC...

The first week of Carolina Bible Camp for 1999 will begin on June 13. CBC has added a seventh week for the upcoming encampment. For regular updates on CBC, check out their website at

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 - * Sun 7/9 Rhodes 7am; DEP: 7PM
 - * Mon (T) (T) 7/10 Patmos 7am; DEP: Patmos 12 Noon; ARV: Ephesus 3pm; DEP: Ephesus 8pm
 - * Tue (T) 7/11 Istanbul 2pm
 - * Wed 7/12 Depart Istanbul 2pm
 - * Thu 7/13 Delos 8am; DEP Delos noon; ARV: Mykonos 2pm; DEP: Mykonos 11pm
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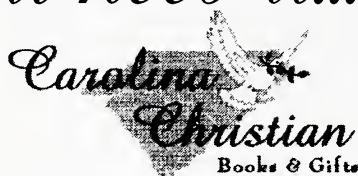
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"Now the God of patience and
consolation grant you to be
likeminded toward one another
according to Christ Jesus . . ."

(Romans 15:5).

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The Blight of Disunity

DENNIS CONNER

It's happened yet again. A friend of mine who preaches in another state wrote me about a situation in the congregation where he serves. The pattern he has described to me is all too familiar. A disgruntled group begins complaining and spreading the seeds of discontent, citing dissatisfaction with the ways things were being done (or not done). And the view of the dissenters, of course, is that their view is truly representative of the truth. In some cases the ear of a church leader is tuned in to the dissenters (in the case of my friend's situation, an elder) and the strife then spreads to the leadership. When the

seldom are the dissenters content to leave well enough alone and many times work behind the scenes to continue to draw people away from the congregation they have left, perpetuating the strife. There may be variations in the scenario just posed, but the attitudes and methods described are fairly typical of church splits with the result being almost universally the same: Christ is dishonored.

In discussions of unity the prayer of Jesus in John 17 is always at the center and at the heart of the prayer itself is verse 21, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they may also be one in

"Unity removes what may be for some a significant barrier to acceptance of the Christian faith."

demands of the disgruntled are not, in their view, answered satisfactorily, they leave and form a new congregation. In the situation described by my friend, the new congregation now sees itself as the only faithful New Testament congregation in that county. And

Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me," and verse 23, "...and that the world may know that You have sent Me..." The tragedy of disunity is that it discredits the very ministry and mission of Christ Himself. It can be a barrier to belief in and acceptance of His mission and God's

grace in sending Him. Thus, it is essential that we diligently strive to protect and maintain the unity created by the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

Disunity takes two fundamental forms: congregational disunity and brotherhood disunity. Congregational disunity is the primary concern in New Testament discussions of unity and oneness. In the epistles of Paul (such as 1 and 2 Corinthians), the apostle dealt with divisive matters that were peculiar to local situations. Today, as then, congregational unity, or division, may easily have a direct effect on the integrity of that congregation's example in a given community. The division in a local congregation may result in a split where one group leaves, or it may not. Tenuous bands of fellowship may be maintained and the congregation held together, but the congregation's effectiveness and example are compromised by the divisive attitudes that exist. Ill will toward others remains and a festering distrust slowly poisons the body. Such a situation as this is no less a dishonor to Christ.

The peace, harmony and oneness of unity, on the other hand, enhance the congregation's ministry to and reputation in the community. Christlike love becomes a powerful

evangelistic influence, drawing sinners to the cross and fellowship of Christ. Unity removes what may be for some a significant barrier to acceptance of the Christian faith.

Then there is brotherhood disunity. Maintaining unity among congregations of a given region, or nation, is a seemingly gargantuan task, as evidenced by the issues and attitudes that have perpetually plagued the church from New Testament times to the present; and the present is certainly no exception. The attitudes and actions that contribute to congregational disunity are also common to the disunity that exists in the body of Christ at large. By the same token, the attitudes and actions that enable congregational unity to be maintained may also contribute to the unity of the church as a whole.

In this issue of *Carolina Christian* our theme articles address the subject of unity and suggest some steps that may be taken to maintain it. It is our hope that they will in some way contribute to greater peace and harmony among the brethren, with the ultimate aim that Christ be glorified through the oneness of His disciples.

Cancer Claims Jim Mankin

We were saddened to learn of the death of brother Jim Mankin, who went to be with the Lord on December 16, 1998, following an eight-month battle with cancer. Mankin was an associate professor of Bible at Abilene Christian University and minister of the Westgate Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas.

Brother Mankin was greatly respected throughout the nation for his work as preacher, author, and educator. He preached for churches in Chattanooga, Tenn., Cincinnati, Ohio, Abilene, Texas, and Madison, Tenn. From 1979-86 he served the Madison Church of Christ, the largest Church of Christ congregation in America, and for four years was the featured speaker on the nationally

syndicated TV program "Amazing Grace Bible Class." He had also served as Director of the annual Blue Ridge Encampment in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

Brother Mankin is survived by his wife, Deloris; his daughter, Alice LaMascus; two sons, Jeff and Ben; Cecil, his father; a brother and a sister, and two grandchildren.

Brother Mankin was a good friend to *Carolina Christian*, on numerous occasions offering words of encouragement and approval for the work being done through its pages. All of us at *Carolina Christian* extend our love and heartfelt sympathy to the Mankin family for their loss. We do rejoice, however, in the faithful life he lived and in the hope given by Jesus Christ.

The 55th Annual Carolina Lectures

The Carolina Lectures, the longest continual regional lectureship among churches of Christ in America, will be hosted this year by the Slater-Marietta church. The dates are April 5-8 and the theme will be "Understanding a

Scriptural Faith." During the week 25 lessons will be offered by qualified speakers from throughout the Carolinas. For more information call Walter Wagner at (864) 836-8309 or 277-5324.

Unity of the Spirit Through the Bond of Peace

Paul takes the first three chapters of Ephesians to help the Christians at Ephesus to realize their spiritual condition was because of God's grace. He reminds them of who they were before they obeyed God and their terrible condition outside of Christ in their former lives. But they had been blessed and redeemed. They had been transformed from a state of hopelessness to a state of security. He strengthened them with the power of His Spirit. He was poised to do more than they could ever dream or imagine according to His power that was at work within them. Over and over Paul impresses upon them who they are as a result of God's work in them.

The last three chapters are devoted to telling them how they ought to live based on who they are. He begins exploring this "living a life worthy of their calling" by discussing unity. One fundamental characteristic of God's people is their quest for unity. In verse 3, Paul pleads for them to "make every effort." This is a strong term meaning, "exert all power." Paul urges them to realize that unity of the Spirit is no small matter. They should put forth whatever energy it takes to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Therefore, unity already exists at one level as he explains in 2:13-18. All baptized believers are bound together because they are all bound

RON NEWBERRY

to Christ. The one Spirit is the agent of that

unity. What Paul desires is not some vague sense of spiritual identity or membership in a religious group. He envisions a profound oneness made possible by God's Spirit. If the Spirit of God binds us together, then peace is the buckle that ensures that the unity does not come apart.

In Colossians 2:19 Paul uses it in reference to the ligaments of the body and in Colossians 3:14 he uses it figuratively to speak of the love that holds the Christian virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness together.

Unfortunately today disunity is the norm. It is not the ideal, but it is the way we are—to our shame. How can we have unity in the church amid disagreements? How can we be at different points or different levels and have unity within the body of Christ?

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How can there be unity when our likes and dislikes clash with those of another? Those are good questions and I think Paul answers them in Ephesians 4. The key to answering these questions is in verses 11-13.

God placed various roles in the church so that the people of God can be equipped to perform works of service (not to be saved but because we are saved) "so that the body of Christ may be built up *until* [emphasis mine] we all reach unity in the faith."

Now, compare the two statements about unity. One says we have unity as a result of the Spirit of God and the other says we have to be built up to the point of reaching unity in the faith. One unity is a given; the other is a struggle. Does Paul contradict himself? No. How can we possess unity and yet unity is something we attain?

The problem seems to be that we equate "unity of the Spirit" with "unity in the faith." If we can understand these two statements on unity we will have an important key to practical unity in the church today.

Note that "unity of the Spirit" is a given as I have indicated. It is not something we gain, achieve or acquire. It is not something we create. We have this unity because we are in Christ. God has created unity by His Spirit. We are commanded to guard and preserve that God created unity. This is not a future state; it is a present condition.

Anyone in Christ is united with all others who are in Christ.

In the second case, "unity in the faith" is something we do have to achieve, attain and acquire. God placed certain leaders and guides in strategic places in the church so that through service the body might grow to maturity in unity of the faith.

How do we do that? The whole context is one of teaching, learning, growing and maturing. Faith comes from "hearing the word of God," does it not? (Rom. 10:17). In other words, our faith is based on our understanding of God's will. Doesn't that imply that we can be at different levels of faith since we are at different levels of knowledge or understanding? That must mean that it is acceptable, even expected, that we have differences and yet stay united. We can be at different levels moving toward a mature unity in the faith and yet maintain unity of the Spirit. We can live together in the peace of verse 3 because we refuse to be caught up in the trap of judging one another.

Think of the implications of this. It isn't necessary to come to an agreement with each other on all "issues" and points of dispute. We can continue to study, grow in our knowledge, develop our own personal faith (and, therefore, disagree on any number of things) and remain united. This also means that there is no excuse for divisions

among us. There's no reason why we cannot disagree, even on some important matters at one level, while we remain united at a fundamental level.

We can and must work at maintaining the unity of the Spirit, which implies it can be broken. We must give each other time and space to grow up in our unity in the faith. However, I am convinced that when we insist that we all must "believe the same thing" on every issue and refuse to fellowship those who differ with us on the slightest subtlety of Scripture, as if we were the author of the sacred Word, we have just shattered the fundamental unity of the Spirit.

What freedom this understanding of this text brings to us. We can refuse to rupture and destroy our unity while we continue in study and dialogue. How many fractures would this have avoided over the past 100 years? How many churches would have remained intact? How might our fellowship be different today if crawled off the throne of righteousness and let God be the eternal judge? How might our fellowship—His church—be different in the future if we humbled ourselves and asked our brothers whom we have alienated to forgive us? How might God bless us if we worked as hard at unity as we seem to do in excluding others who don't see every text as we do? As I heard Alan Bryan say one time many years ago, "If we fought the devil as hard as we fought

each other, we'd have him killed off tomorrow."

Although I haven't focused on the first two verses of Ephesians 4, they are critical to this discussion. We must be humble (willing to be taught), gentle (as we instruct others), patient (give each other time), bearing with one another (tolerant) in love (looking out for each other's best interest). Most of us can endure even someone who is diametrically opposed to a particular point of view we hold if they are kind, not overbearing, courteous and loving toward us. On the other hand, when someone is arrogant and rude, they slam shut the door of communication. When we are humble, gentle, patient, tolerant with one another in love we will stay united in the Spirit while we move toward unity in the faith. Unity in the faith is the goal but not a necessity to salvation. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit is the necessity! Heaven help those who destroy it over disputable matters.

Paul teaches us to make every effort, exert all our power to maintain what we have been given—the unity of the Spirit. Those who are willing to split and splinter at the drop of a hat and who are quite prepared to drop the hat themselves should heed Paul's inspired message.

Ron Newberry serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC, and is Associate Editor of Carolina Christian. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Balance and Unity

Balance is so important in our response to biblical truth. Unfortunately, it is often such a difficult thing to achieve, and then, having achieved it, to maintain. An example of our struggle to achieve and maintain balance can be seen in how we often corrupt a biblical text by emphasizing one part to the exclusion of another. For instance, in John 4:24 Jesus made the familiar statement that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The essence of Christ's imperative is that we must worship God acceptably. The scope of biblical worship is that it be in spirit *and* in truth.

Sadly, some of us focus on one and ignore the other. Some want worship that feels good without reference to biblical guidelines. Others emphasize the forms to the seeming neglect of the heart. On the one hand, we may run the risk of having a zeal for God, but without knowledge. On the other, we may run the risk of being like the Pharisees, who were known for having a knowledge of the law without a heartfelt response. They honored God with their lips but their hearts were far away from Him (Matthew 15:8). Jesus commanded worship that is in spirit *and* in truth. We reject His teaching when we seek worship in spirit *or* in truth. Balance will seek to honor Christ in both.

In much the same way, questions of unity and doctrinal purity also need to be approached with biblical

MARK HUDSON

balance.

Unfortunately, however,

some people see unity and doctrinal purity as mutually exclusive, being willing to sacrifice basic doctrinal precepts for the sake of unity. They will tolerate any departure from the faith in the name of oneness. They see life in terms of unity or doctrine, and they are willing to ignore Bible truths to forge a unity of human origin.

On the other hand, some have acted divisively in their pursuit of doctrine. In their desire for purity they have alienated faithful Christians with differing opinions. They have divided over non-scriptural issues and have erected walls of separation that God did not build. They see life in terms of doctrine or unity, and they are willing to forsake Bible unity to follow their own man-made teachings.

Great harm comes when we seek unity at the expense of doctrinal purity, as well as what we may perceive as purity at the expense of unity. Unity that is not founded on biblical truth is not biblical unity. A church cannot be doctrinally pure if it is not serious about unity. May God grant us balance as we seek the full counsel of God.

Mark Hudson preaches for the Whiskey Rd. church in Aiken, SC. He can be contacted at 2006 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803.

Carolina Christian Classic Reprint

There are many causes of division (some of which we are aware of and we constantly warn against their danger) among the people of God, but not the least among them (and one that is often overlooked or ignored) is the selfish desire of each of us to have our own way in everything. This is manifest in a thirst for power, the desire to rule, or the disposition to settle all matters one's own way. It is further seen in the will to force upon all others one's own will, the arrogant attitude that knows no submission except in others, the logic that binds one's own logic, the opinion that one's opinions are in reality matters of faith, the binding of what one considers reasonable conclusions (conclusions not specifically, implicitly or explicitly, taught in the Scriptures), the forcing of one's faith upon the conscience of another, etc. These are symptoms of the disposition which often alienates and divides.

If one studies seriously the concepts of restoration leaders, he cannot help but see that their disposition was to reconcile rather than alienate. They said, in essence, "Let us hold nothing as a matter of faith nor carry out any practice, regardless of how fond we may be of it personally, that is not clearly a 'thus

HOWARD WINTERS

saith the Lord.' If the word of God does not

teach it, we will not practice it for the sake of peace and unity. Unity among brethren is more important to us than the practice of our own opinions." As Paul was willing to do in the case of his liberty to eat meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8:13), they were willing to do (at least in theory) in any matter which did not

"No man can cause division in a church of Christ [on any matter that is not essential to the salvation of souls] to the glory of God."

involve a divinely revealed truth in order to have a united church. This is simply to say that they were willing to surrender their liberties if and when the practice of their liberties got in the way of peace.

Paul said, "...whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). His point is that eating meat offered to idols when it violated a brother's conscience could not be done to the glory of God. Of course it was not wrong to eat the meat *per se*, but it was wrong to

disrespect and trample under foot the conscience of another. And one could not glorify God by doing so. In this instance, therefore, one could not glorify God without surrendering his personal liberties for the good of his brother. This is a great principle that the early leaders of the restoration movement understood far better than we do today. No man can cause division in a church of Christ (on any matter that is not essential to the salvation of souls) to the glory of God. Wherever there is division there is sin. Thus, when we cause division by the forcing of a selfish disposition, we sin. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

But on the other hand, if we will develop the unselfish attitude or disposition of surrendering all that is not specifically taught in the divine word, and receive all as brethren who do the same, not to doubtful disputations (Romans 14:1), not for the purpose of judging or forcing on them correction, but with a mutual and honest effort to practice the Bible in every essential particular, to preach the gospel and save the lost, unity will prevail. How could it be otherwise?

The quickest way to divide the body of Christ is for any of us to set ourselves up as judge and jury on the correctness of every church and individual, on the "soundness" of every man and action, on the acceptability for fellowship of

everyone the world over who has obeyed the gospel, and on the degree of error one may hold or practice and still be recognized as a child of God. In short, to have unity we must recognize that God is the judge, and (in the sense we are here using the term) He has not committed that prerogative to us.

Of course each of us must go about doing the right as God gives us the vision to see the right, teaching others to do right as He has revealed the right, and in the spirit of meekness and fear study the Bible together to determine what is right. When we all have the disposition to do right, as it is revealed in the Bible, unity will be a reality. But unity can never prevail as long as we arrogantly and selfishly demand that every man's conscience must bow in humble submission to our own faith and knowledge. It is a sad day in the church of our Lord when Christians cannot meet with anyone, regardless of their belief or practice, and with mutual respect mutually study the revelation of God's divine will for all men.

Howard Winters was editor of Carolina Christian for 17 years. This editorial originally appeared in the March 1985 issue.

Speaking Out About Unity

Today there is an attitude which makes it easy for brethren to divide and splinter, without giving it a second thought. Many times it is done in the name of upholding truth, but I doubt that that is the taproot of the problem....First Corinthians 1:10 is a very familiar passage where Paul appeals for unity....We often appeal to this passage and say that we're to speak the same things, to be of the same mind and the same judgment, that there be no divisions among us, and we stop right there. Then when anyone differs with us about anything, he is the one who is responsible for division. We need to study this in its context and to see the framework in which this was said so we can understand what the problem was.... First Corinthians 1:11-14: "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius."

The problem of division at Corinth was related to men. It is easy for one to preach oneself instead of Christ and to draw people to oneself rather than to Christ. There's nothing wrong with being appreciated, but this may lead to problems unless one is careful to avoid its getting out of hand. One may be attracted to some personality instead of to Christ. When this

happens, factions are sure to develop. Self-seeking leads to preaching which draws people to men. Whether one likes to admit it or not, one may preach oneself and be deceived in thinking that he is preaching the gospel. Paul knew the danger. He saw it in Corinth and warned against it. It took determined effort on his part to avoid it. First Corinthians 2:2: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Second Corinthians 4:4-5: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servant for Jesus' sake."

Here lies the background of false teaching. The self-seeking of men was back of the wisdom of the world, the false teaching that splintered the church in Corinth...Galatians 5:24, 26: "And they that are Christ's have the flesh with the affections and lusts...Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." Galatians 6:14: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Paul struck at the key to curing division when he said "crucify the flesh." Three times in the epistle he speaks of crucifying the flesh: "I pray that I may never compromise the truth, but I also pray that I may be humble and thankful unto God for

redeeming me from sin and ruin. I pray that I, like Paul, may see my own littleness and God's greatness and seek to point men unto Him. Years of preaching and study have opened my eyes to the ease of developing a party spirit and to becoming part of a faction. May God help us to have the courage, the wisdom, and the willingness to deny self, to crucify self, so that we are not self-seeking and self-serving. If we solve the problem of division within the church, there will have to be some crosses on which selves are crucified."

(Franklin Camp, "The Problem of a Splintered Church: A Plea for Truth, Wisdom, and Unity," Sound Doctrine,

April-June, 1982)

"Whether divisions proliferate or greater unity prevails, depends largely on the attitudes we adopt. Division has developed largely because we have fostered divisive attitudes. We have focused on our differences more than we have on our areas of agreement. That needs to change radically. We need to stop looking at our brethren for excuses to cut them off from our acceptance. Instead, we need to look for reasons to extend fellowship. Our treatment of each other must shift from rejection to understanding. We need to stop thinking that we need to find a different church every time we

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discover that we have a disagreement with a brother."

(Norman Bales, "Christian Liberty and Doctrinal Differences")

"That division among the Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is antichristian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is antisciptural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express

command. It is antinatural, as it excites Christians to condemn, to hate, and oppose one another, who are bound by the highest and most endearing obligations to love each other as brethren, even as Christ has loved them. In a word, it is productive of confusion and of every evil work."

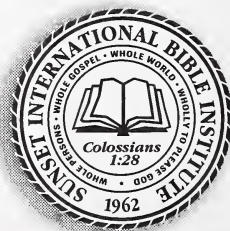
(Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address: Proposition 10")

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Brotherhood News

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shooting. If you have a skill to teach, or if
you would like to help by leading singing
or a devotional, please contact Alan
Watson at (864) 654-3583 or by e-mail at:
Watsonal@juno.com. **YADKINVILLE,**

NC...The annual Small Church Workshop
will be conducted May 20-21, 1999 at the
Yadkinville church of Christ. **SYLVA,**

NC...Representatives from twelve
congregations from North and South
Carolina met in December to discuss TV
evangelism underway in Ukraine. Since
1995, Bob Rigdon's program "Happiness
Explained" has aired each week on

MARK HUDSON

Ukrainian TV. Thousands
have responded for Bible
study, and over two

- hundred have asked to be baptized. Six
- new congregations have been
- established. For more information about
- this work you can contact Bob Rigdon at
- the Sylva church of Christ, PO Box 101,
- Sylva, NC 28779. **KINGSTREE, SC...** Billy
- McVey reports a successful Speakers
- include Jeff Trotter, C. W. Bradley, Al
- Simmons and David Pharr. Lunch will be
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- **MOCKSVILLE, NC...**In last month's
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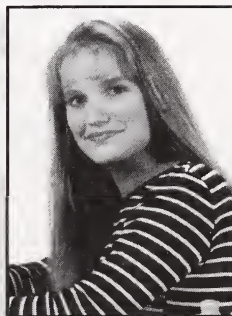
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In Search of Renewal

Part I

PHIL STAPP

Since the earliest days of the Church, congregations and individual Christians have struggled. Sin, the influences of the world, the lack of faith and love and so many other problems have contributed to this spiritual struggle. Things are no different today. Young people leaving the church, climbing divorce rates, lack of commitment, immorality, poor leadership, unbiblical teaching, greed, selfishness and the desire for power all contribute to our problems. Many within churches of Christ see these struggles and are alarmed, and rightly so. Satan is on the prowl like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Something needs to be done, but what?

It is my desire in this series to examine what the Bible says about spiritual renewal, how it happens and what changes it brings about in our lives. First it is important to come to a biblical definition of spiritual renewal. To do so let us begin with the words of Jesus.

"And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will

be sons of the Most High, because he is

kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:33-36)

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone." (Luke 11:42)

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34)

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (John 14:23-24)

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." (John

15:9-14)

With so many passages to choose from, why choose these? I chose these because they state the ultimate goal of all of Christ's teachings, the love of God and of others. Paul tells us that love is the most reliable measure of spirituality, more reliable than gifts, works, or knowledge. It is one of the few things that will last forever (1 Corinthians 13).

Paul demonstrates the connection between renewal and love in Romans, chapter 12. The life that is transformed by the renewing of its mind loves God and others. It demonstrates its love for God by being humble (12:3), living in harmony with others (12:4-8, 10, 15-18), hating what is evil (12:9), sharing with God's people who are in need and showing hospitality (12:13). It demonstrates love for others by living in harmony with others (12:3-5, 16), using its gifts to serve others (12:6-8), being devoted to brotherly love and honoring others above itself (12:10), sharing with those in need and practicing hospitality (12:13), and by associating with people of low position (12:16). Notice the similarities?

All are closely related and all develop out of loving God with your entire being and loving others as yourself. This is the goal of God's transforming power in our lives. It is his greatest desire that we be transformed by his love in order to live his love. This is not something that we

can accomplish; it is God's work. We are "transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Taking the words of Jesus and Paul into consideration, I offer the following definition of spiritual renewal. It is the process by which one escapes self and becomes absorbed in the love of God and others. As we have seen, the substance of real spirituality is love. It is not our love, but God's, that moves into our hearts and minds. It affirms that he values and cares for us and moves us from self-preoccupation to sacrifice, obedience and the love and service of others.

Total absorption in the love of God is what God has always desired from his people (Deuteronomy 6:3-4). This removal of self and absorption in God and in others is a process. It does not happen at baptism only nor does it ever end. How much we are transformed by the love of God depends on our willingness to be changed.

The articles to follow in this series will examine different aspects of the Christian life and how they encourage spiritual renewal. May God bless us as we search for his renewing power in our lives and in our congregations!

*Phil Stapp can be contacted at 2010
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Lectureship Schedule

SUNDAY

10:00 a.m. ETSP: Past, Present, Future **Bill Nicks**
11:00 a.m. 25th Year of Lectures: A Review **Lonnie Smith**
7:00 p.m. Singing **Mike Maddox**
7:30 p.m. Student: Purity of Thought **David Smith**
7:45 p.m. Analyzing the Age **Tom Holland**

MONDAY

8:00 a.m. Foundational Doctrines for a
Successful Spiritual Life **Dave Miller**
8:40 a.m. The Need for & Limitations
of Sincerity **Les Bonnett**
9:20 a.m. The Church's Involvement in the
Community **Stephen Rogers**
Class: Baptism & the Grace
of God **William Woodson**
10:30 a.m. The Meaning of Discipleship **Dub McClish**
Ladies: Seeking Spiritual Beauty **Shelia Butt**
11:20 a.m. Some Effects of our Moral Collapse
on the Church **Marlin Connelly**
12:00 N Lunch
1:30 p.m. The Restoration Plea **Charles Brown**
2:20 p.m. Why Christians Backslide **Wellington Smith**
Class: Abundant Life **Jackie Stearsman**
3:10 p.m. Problems in Worship **Dave Miller**
7:00 p.m. Singing **Jerry Carmichael**
7:30 p.m. Committed to Christian Living **Jo Puckett**
7:45 p.m. What It Means to Preach
Christ **Winford Claiborne**

TUESDAY

8:00 a.m. Foundational Doctrines for a
Successful Spiritual Life **Dave Miller**
8:40 a.m. Legalism and Liberalism **Joseph Meador**
9:20 a.m. What Christian Living is All About **Mel Futrell**
Class: Baptism & the Church **William Woodson**
10:30 a.m. Must Not Restructure the
Church **Robert Taylor, Jr.**

10:30 a.m. Ladies: Menace of Materialism--
Priorities Misplaced **Irene Taylor**
11:20 a.m. Christians in all Seasons of
Life **Jack Wilhelm**
12:00 N Lunch
1:30 p.m. The Value of True Worship **Al Simmons**
2:20 p.m. "No Fear of God" **Michael Brandt**
Class: The Confidence of
Abundant Life **Jackie Stearsman**
3:10 p.m. The Problem of Selecting a
Translation **Clayton Winters**
7:00 p.m. Singing **Ken Forrest**
7:30 p.m. Bible Study **A. J. Zenthoef**
7:45 p.m. Relying on God to Make
Abundant Life Possible **Jackie Stearsman**

WEDNESDAY

8:00 a.m. Foundational Doctrines for a
Successful Spiritual Life **Dave Miller**
8:40 a.m. The Transformed Life **James Rogers**
9:30 a.m. Personal Evangelism **Wallace Maxwell**
Class: Baptism & the
Christian Life **William Woodson**
10:30 a.m. "Let Us" Admonitions in
Hebrews **David Pharr**
Ladies: Seeing Souls Through
the Eyes of Jesus **Cindy Colley**
Jesus Christ: Our Example **Jim Pharr**
11:20 a.m. Lunch
12:00 N
2:00 p.m. Faith Transmitted into Action **Tom Miller**
2:20 a.m. The Proper Perspective of
Possessions and Anxiety **Lester Kamp**
Class: The Gratitude of
Abundant Life **Jackie Stearsman**
3:10 p.m. Problems of Extremes **Edwin Jones**
7:00 p.m. Singing **James Steele**
7:30 p.m. Student: Worship **James Martin**
7:45 p.m. Christ Above All **V. P. Black**

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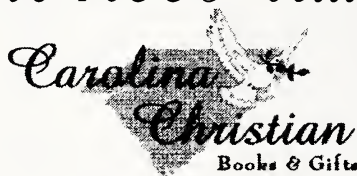
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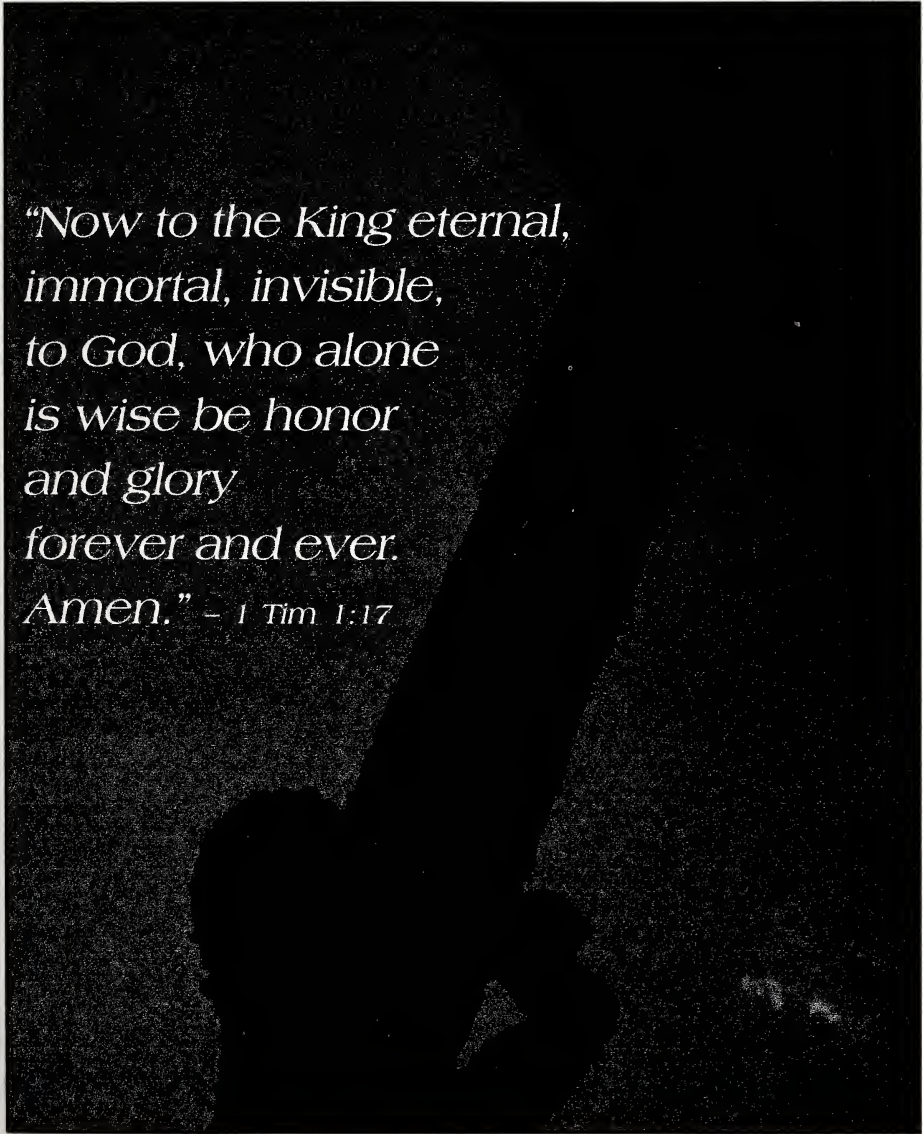
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immortal, invisible,
to God, who alone
is wise be honor
and glory
forever and ever.
Amen." - 1 Tim. 1:17*



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The Authority of Elders

W

ithout question,
one of the most

Dennis Conner

And whoever desires to be
first among you, let him be

sensitive issues (if not the most sensitive) in relation to the study of biblical eldership is that of authority. For the past three decades discussions have raged hot and heavy over the question of the authority of elders: do they have authority over a congregation, or do they not. The real issue, however, is not whether elders have authority. They do. Rather, the question is how elders are to exercise their authority and how that authority can best be used for the care and building up of the church. The answer is found in the principles of servanthood and submission.

The Servant Principle

Too often, elderships have abused the authority granted them by God, resulting in untold harm to the body of Christ. Many elders see themselves as holding rank over others in the church, which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The apostle Peter warned elders against "lording it over the flock," thus repudiating an insensitive, authoritarian style of leadership. Peter, for his part, had learned this truth years earlier from Jesus Himself.

Perhaps Peter was thinking back to that day when Jesus had caught them arguing among themselves as to who would have the chief seats in the coming kingdom. The Lord had chastised them by saying, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28; see also Mark 10:41-45). Here Jesus confronted the tendency to lust for power and revealed that the real power of leading lies in a heart of humble servanthood. He clearly associated "lording" with worldliness ("the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them"). In contrast, the Lord said, "it shall not be so among you."

Jesus rejected the authoritarian style of leadership and imposed another, radically different style. He put it in the form of a paradox: to be first, you must be last. That is, the way to greatness in His kingdom is the way of servanthood. What is taught here runs completely counter to the standards and values of the world. The world puts a premium on power and authority; Jesus put a premium on self-imposed slavery to others. The world promotes self-preservation; Jesus promotes the giving of self. The world teaches self-glorification; Jesus teaches humility. The world asks, "What can you do for me?"; Jesus teaches that the real question is, "What can I do for you?"

As the model for the very attitude and leadership style He endorsed, Jesus pointed the disciples to Himself: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Thus, elders must constantly keep their eyes on Jesus as their example and spiritual mentor. Though He was God in

the flesh and possessed the power to command all the angels of heaven itself, Jesus still willingly took on the form of a servant and offered Himself as a sacrifice in order to accomplish the greater good of mankind. Following Jesus' lead, when elders pour themselves out on behalf of others, seeking the greater good of the church, exchanging ego for selflessness, there will be little resistance to their authority.

The greatest leaders, then, are those who are self-sacrificing servants. The wise elder leads by serving. He realizes that he has not been called to an official office, but to a ministry.

The Submission Principle

In Ephesians 5:21 Paul exhorts all the Christians in the church there to "submit (be subject) to one another." This embraces all Christians, including church leaders of all sorts. By its very definition, the word submit implies a relationship of two equals. That is, one equal party chooses to yield to another. Someone might be able to enslave me, but he cannot submit me. Someone may, however, submit to me. Submission is something the individual chooses to do. Thus, we choose to give ourselves up to the needs of others in the body of Christ. Elders do this by loving and caring for the members of the body the way they need to

be loved and cared for. They exercise their leadership in a spirit of humble submission.

Employing the submission principle, each one, member and elder, seeks the

greater good of the other and puts the well-being of each other member ahead of his own.

Conclusion

Both of these attitudes can be seen in the model of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-17). The good shepherd, Jesus

says, truly cares for his sheep and is even willing to sacrifice himself for his sheep. In response, the sheep know him and hear his voice.

An elder who follows the example of Jesus' shepherding style will have little trouble getting the sheep to follow his lead (hear his voice). When people know that they are loved and cared for, when they know that the elder is a man of integrity and can be trusted, they will willingly follow. Because they trust him and know that they are loved by him, they submit to him. On the other hand, there is a natural instinct to rebel against those who try to impose their authority upon us. The attitude that says, "We are the elders, therefore you must obey what we decide," while technically correct in that elders do possess authority of a kind, will typically be resented (and perhaps even resisted) because it is attitudinally incorrect.

**"The greatest
leaders, then,
are those who are
self-sacrificing
servants."**

How Big Are Your Spiders?

"In any given situation, what you are determines what you see; what you see determines what you do" (Haddon Robinson, *Leadership*).

Ron Newberry

only room for one savior on the throne.

Have you ever seen a series of pictures of hideous creatures sporting claws, pinchers or horrible fangs only to discover from the caption that you are not looking at the latest Lucas creations for his next *Star Wars* movie; you are actually looking at common creatures like dust mites or chiggers magnified ten thousand times. The point is, if magnified sufficiently, even harmless, ordinary things can be misconstrued as monsters.

It's not always easy to keep perspective but we must try. Every few months someone declares that the newest innovation or latest approach to doing church is the beginning of the end. "The church is one short step away from apostasy! Who will save the church from certain doom if we..." You fill in the blank. Unfortunately there are some all too willing to accept the role as savior.

Jack R. Van Ens wrote, "What destroys perspective is our penchant to measure ministry on too small a scale. We lose the wide-angle view because we're riveted on the close-up. Using a microscopic lens, even a harmless spider looks like a hairy, horrible monster. Most of us would never clean cobwebs from the house if we focused on the close-up view of spiders."

Most of the monsters perceived to be infesting the church today are close-up views that make them look scarier than they are. Somewhere we must develop some confidence in Christ's ability to care for and protect his own church and that there is

Is this a plea for laziness or lowering our guard against false teaching and false teachers? Certainly not! Should we do nothing to defend truth? Of course not! It's merely a plea to make certain we have the proper perspective. Not everything with which you or I disagree is a ghastly beast which, if unleashed, is destined to corrupt the church for eternity. Not everything with which you or I may disagree is even a right or wrong issue.

Unfortunately we have grown up in a culture that demands that there be winners and losers where there are differences of opinion. In fact, in religion we have all but eliminated the possibility that there can be differences of opinion. Everything is reduced to doctrinal issues. If we accept that every point of view must automatically have a right or wrong doctrinal dimension, and that our individual position is the right one, then it logically follows that every position that differs from ours is wrong.

While there are a number of concerns that have definite right and wrong sides, not everything falls into that category. There are, as Paul implies in Romans 14, disputable matters on which there is no right or wrong answer. In those areas we are to be non-judgmental and stop the condemnation. Even harmless things may look monstrous under those conditions. To be sure, those prone to looking at everything under a microscope can only see giant spiders. Remember those close-up views of spiders may keep us from cleaning out the cobwebs.

How big are your spiders?

Apologies

For Late Mailing

We would like to blame it on El Nino or his little sister, La Nina, but it wasn't weather related. We would hope to blame it on Y2K, but it's too early. We do apologize for the late mailing of the February issue. Due to a computer crash and complications in getting it up and running again, the February issue was a almost two weeks late in getting to the printers. We appreciate your patience. We would also appreciate your help in finding the guy who keeps telling us how much easier computers are supposed to make or lives!

A Brave Soldier Finishes His Fight

Brother J. C. Townsend passed from this life on January 15, 1999 after a long battle with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). A respected preacher and educator, J. C. once preached for the Orangeburg, SC church and also taught classes for the Alabama Christian School of Religion in Columbia, SC and Charlotte, NC. He may have been the longest known survivor of ALS, suffering with the disease for over 30 years. At the time of his death he was residing in the Sunrise Health and Rehab Center in Plantation, Florida. Brother Townsend is survived by his wife, Lou, and two daughters. Lou's home address is 12901 S. W. 15th Court, Ivanhoe #105, Pembroke, FL 33027. Our deepest sympathies and heartfelt prayers go out to the family of this humble servant of God.

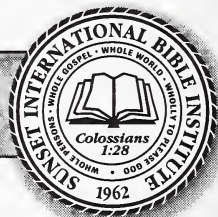
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The Soul That Longs For God

the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence reads:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Our entire culture seems to be taken with the idea that the pursuit of happiness is and should be the main goal of every person. But do we ever really attain it? Most people, at least those I know, who have given their lives to the pursuit of happiness have never really attained to what they would call true happiness. Perhaps it all hinges on how we define the word. Or perhaps we're mistaken about what makes us happy. Perhaps we need to consider that our search for happiness or satisfaction has been misguided. It could be that we have been looking for the wrong thing. For many people the search finds its fulfillment in things, but things don't satisfy; only God satisfies.

Yet, most people today haven't learned that lesson and are still hungering and thirsting after money as the key to happiness. Satan has done a great job making us think that our biggest problem is a lack of happiness and that if we have enough—enough money, enough things—then we will be happy. The biggest problem, however, is not a lack of happiness. It is sin. It is sin that has separated us from God and it is only when we get rid of sin in our lives and walk with God that we'll find rest for our souls, a peace that passes understanding,

Peter Rode

and happiness that is grounded in God. In Isaiah 55:2 God asks, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?"

Only God satisfies, so we need to come to the place where we're hungry for God. David sang,

"O God you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you" (Psalm 63:1).

David was expressing a longing for an intimate relationship with the Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth. He seems to use the words of an addict who has no use for life without the substance that gives his life meaning and which brings him joy. Addiction has been defined as "God hunger directed at the wrong source of soul satisfaction." Within us there is a desire to seek after God because He is not far from us and longs to be known by us. He has made us in His image and when He is not the center of our lives that image is deficient in one way or another. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal put it succinctly, "There's a God-shaped vacuum in every man that only God can fill." "Our hearts are restless," said Augustine, "until we find our rest in You."

Those who long for God have recog-

nized this emptiness. It's what Jesus called a "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). We really don't know what it's like to be hungry and thirsty in this country, and that might well be our greatest stumblingblock to our understanding of this text. We hardly ever miss a meal

■
"God wants
to fill us, so we
must come to
Him empty."
■

and when we do we complain bitterly. What Jesus talked about is not the hunger you experience before breakfast or the thirst for a Coke between meals. The hunger

and thirst Jesus spoke of is an insatiable spiritual appetite and as He described the character of His followers He promised that they would be filled; they would be completely satisfied. The hungering and thirsting is so intense that it drives believers to the source of satisfaction. When we are passionate about God we will seek Him and long for Him.

The following story contains a lot of truth:

Satan convened a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels he said, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Scriptures and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from conservative values. But we can do something else. We can keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship

Carolina Christian

experience in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So, let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, Angels. Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!"

"How shall we do this?" shouted his angels.

"Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend; then borrow, borrow, borrow. Convince the wives to go to work for long hours and the husbands to work 6 or 7 days a week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work. Over stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive, to keep the TV, VCR, CD's and their PC's going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-religious music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ. Fill their tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk

mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogs, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering, along with free products, services, and false hopes.

Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week. Don't let them go out in nature to reflect on God's wonders. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion. Let

them be involved in soul-winning, but crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing health and family unity for the good of the cause." It was quite a convention in the end, and the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and to rush here, there and everywhere.

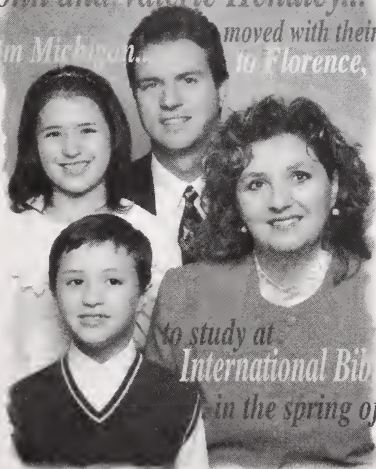
You and I have felt that emptiness. We have been duped by Satan and his demons. We've become so busy chasing after things—both good and bad—that

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we've lost sight of what Christianity is all about. The goal is to have an intimate relationship with God through Jesus or Lord. We've wondered at times if we've forever lost that most important link of faith that shapes who we are and who we can become. For us who are Christians, this emptiness is equivalent to having lost our first love (Revelation 2:2-5). It is possible to work hard for Christ, hate evil, suffer for Christ, and yet grow cold. Keith Green puts it this way in his song entitled My Eyes are Dry:

.....
"My eyes are dry, my faith is old, my heart is hard,
my prayers are cold.
And I know what I ought to be, alive to you and
dead to me.
What can be done with an old heart like mine?
Soften it Lord, with oil and wine.
The oil is you, your Spirit of love.
Please wash me anew in the wine of Your blood."
.....

What we need to do is to stop the madness of all this "busyness" and ask how we can awaken that hunger and thirst for God so that we might be satisfied. We must stop all this striving and chasing after the wind. We need to "seek first His kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). We need to be still so that we might know that He truly is God (Psalm 46:10).

We also need to understand that we cannot dilute or soften what Jesus is saying. He's not pronouncing a benediction on those who are half-hearted about seeking satisfaction. A snack won't do! God wants to fill us, so we must come to Him empty. We must empty ourselves of all pride, self-

righteousness, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and any other self-ism that we might have. We may be blind to our spiritual condition or possess a hard heart. Our desire to be filled by God needs to clear any obstacle in our way.

Moses knew the Lord. "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11). But Moses wanted to know more of God. He said, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you" (Exodus 33:13). Moses had a hunger for God, for His righteousness, and to know His ways. This sounds like Paul, who wrote, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection..." after saying that he considered all his attainments prior to know Jesus as "rubbish" (Philippians 3:8, 10). Both Paul and Moses knew God, but they were not satisfied. They had a hunger for God. They had a passion for Him. When we come to God with this attitude, wanting to be filled by Him, He has promised to satisfy us completely.

Another problem we have in our modern world with all its distractions is mediocrity. We've lost our focus and walk around in a daze. Our lives are so full that we cannot pay enough attention to most of what we do, let alone our spiritual well-being. In his book Addicted to Mediocrity, Franky Schaeffer maintains that we have lost our passion for excellence. We are willing to settle for less in our spiritual lives than what God desires. Perhaps it's because we live in peace without real

suffering or persecution. With this “freedom” we tend to take so much for granted that it fosters a casual type of Christianity; one in which we only serve at our convenience. Again, our passion is missing.

David’s life was filled with a deep spiritual desire to know God and the Psalms reflect the cry of a seeker and the joyous shout of the finder. He was passionate about God. He possessed the burning desire to overcome the obstacles in his life so that he might have that intense, personal relationship with God. Perhaps the complacency in so much of the church reflects or lack of “holy desire.” We’re not hungry enough, not thirsty enough to want to be filled! We’re satisfied with what we have.

To sum up, if you feel there’s more to the Christian life than what you’re experiencing, if you feel empty and yearn

to know more of God, then I suggest the following: (1) empty yourself of everything and become submissive to the will of God in everything, as Jesus did when He came to earth as a human being (Philippians 2:6), (2) be still—stop the busyness in your life, the hurriedness and clamoring, that drown out His presence—and allow time for God, and (3) pray, study, and meditate on His word. Allow God to fill you with His Spirit, His word, and His love. This should help you rekindle your hunger and thirst for the Lord, which will in turn foster the attitude of the psalmist who wrote, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul pants for the living God...” (Psalm 42:1-2a). I pray that you will want to have created within you a passion for God so that you will long to eat from “the Bread of Life” and drink from “the Living Water” and be eternally satisfied.

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church and may be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.


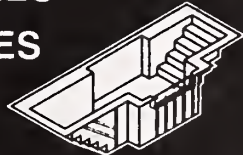

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The Virtue of Vision

In the year 1870 a church in Indiana was having their annual conference. At one point the president of the college where they were meeting said, "I think we live in a very exciting age." The presiding bishop asked, "What do you see?" The college president responded, "I believe we are coming into a time of great inventions. I believe, for example, that men will fly through the air like birds." The bishop responded, "This is heresy! The Bible says that flight is reserved for the angels. We will have no such talk here." The bishop, whose name was Wright, had a three year old son at the time he made that statement. His name was Orville. In 1871 he would have another son. His name would be Wilbur. And you know what they did to their father's lack of vision!

A great attribute of youth is the willingness to rise above the pessimism of the present and dare to look beyond and dream. Wilbur and Orville captured a vision of flight and didn't stop until it became a reality. Their efforts were constantly opposed, but every modern advancement which blesses our culture began in someone's imagination. Those who have the courage to pursue their dreams in spite of the negative voices succeed.

Imagination is God-given. The ability
Carolina Christian

Jerry Senn

to dream—to envision something not yet real—is a unique trait of humans. God wants this instinctive genius activated to proclaim the

those who have the courage to pursue their dreams in spite of the negative voices succeed.

good news about Jesus and the salvation found only in Him. Surely the command to take this word of hope to "all creation" challenges the most inventive minds among us today.

This vision of world evangelism did not originate with men. It is God's dream for the church. He provides the challenge and the resources to accomplish the task. One of our

often forgotten resources is the ability to think creatively, using the tools and talents we each possess. The first century church took Jesus to the Roman world by every method imaginable. Read carefully the book of Acts. They talked about Him in their homes, in the markets, schools and synagogues. Each believer seems to have felt a freedom to use his or her own situation as a springboard for advancing the cause of Christ.

Where is that freedom to use our creative abilities in the church today? Have we become so formalistic that we feel it is heresy to pursue fresh ideas or lay aside our human traditions? Let us never seek to bind present methods as though they were the commands of God. In our efforts to promote sound doctrine let us never break

the spirit of those who dare to dream and create biblically sound methods.

No method or teaching should ever compromise the gospel message. The New Testament teaching for worship, organization and membership must be faithfully taught, understood and appropriately applied within each local church, but Christians should be encouraged to use their creative resources to the fullest in reaching a lost and dying world with the message of hope and life.

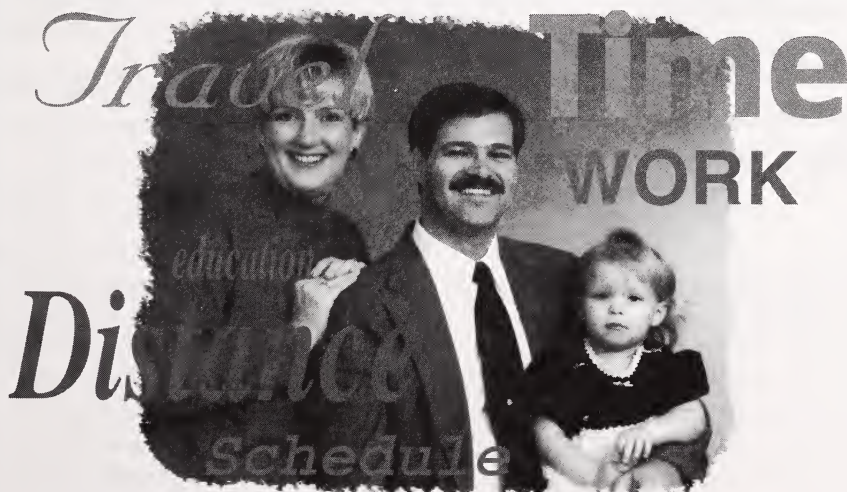
What some call "heresy" today may well become effective methods for reaching souls for Jesus tomorrow. Is it not true that organized Sunday School classes, Christian

colleges, orphan homes, located preachers, and yes, even gospel papers were all once called "heresy" by some? But, thank God, men and women of the past courageously broke new ground in establishing worthy methods of doing God's work.

Vision is a virtue. I pray that we will encourage every Scriptural method and give our support to those who show us better ways to serve our wonderful Father.

Jerry Senn preaches for the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville, NC. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

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Prepare the Way of the Lord

(Part Two)

*a voice of one calling
in the desert,*

Prepare the way for the Lord, make
straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and
hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight, the
rough ways smooth.

And all mankind will see God's salvation."

(Luke 3:4-6, NIV)

John was sent to prepare the way for the
Messiah. He knew that God was at work in

The gospel lays
claim on our lives,
on our inner being,
on our thoughts
and emotions,
and on our
daily actions.

the
world,
that the
new
world
was
breaking
in. He
knew
that the
kingdom
of God
was
about to
begin.
John

knew that the Messiah was about to appear
and he gave his life to preparing the way.
John had put his life on the line to boldly
strike at the things that stood in the way of
God's redemptive action. John was
expectantly awaiting the Messiah, but even
he didn't know that the Messiah would be
like.

While John was wasting away in prison,
his disciples told him about Jesus and what

Stephen Mathis

was happening. "John, the
lame are walking, the blind

are seeing, the poor have hope. This man,
Jesus, is offering hope and life." It sounded
too good to be true and John wanted to
know if Jesus was in fact the one he had
been waiting for. The ministry he was
hearing about was not what he expected.
Where were the armies? Where was the
winnowing fork? Where was the harsh
judgment? So John sent a message to Jesus,
"Are you the one that is to come, or are we
to wait for another?"

That was not a question of doubt or
despair. John knew that God was at work.
He just wanted some clarification. "Jesus,
are you the one I should believe in?" John
was searching, looking like all of us. He
asked the ultimate question of faith:
Should I believe in you? Should I call you
the Lord? Should I let you, and you alone,
rule my life?

The amazing thing is that Jesus did *not*
answer John's question. In essence Jesus'
response was, "Go tell John what he
already knows. I can't answer that question
for him. He has to decide" (see Luke 7:21-
23). Jesus' answer was to point to the work
of God, the reality of the gospel in the lives
of real people. He pointed to the reality of
the kingdom because it was in the presence
of the kingdom that these things hap-
pened: the lame walk, the blind see, the
poor have hope, the captives are set free.
Lives are changed. Souls are transformed.
God lays His claim on the lives of believers.
That's what we call *gospel*.

We today are left with a choice, a choice

and the cost of faith. We can't just say the right words and hope that's enough. We can't just go through the motions and fail to change on the inside. The gospel lays claim on our lives, on our inner being, on our thoughts and emotions, and on our daily actions. The call of faith rings out through the clutter of our lives, "Prepare the way of the Lord." Put yourself to death on the altar of faith. Enter into God's redeeming work. Reject the lifestyle of the world around you; reject the easy security of a spiritless religion. Live for God.

You have to choose if you will believe. Is Jesus the Messiah? Is He the one you are waiting for? Should you believe in Him

and Him alone? Will you pay the price of faith, as did John?

Remember, that choice of faith comes with a cost. It comes with a cross. But it also comes with a blessing:

The path is made straight,
The valley of despair is filled with hope.
The mountain of stress is laid low with abundant life.

You can see the salvation of God at work.

Are you prepared? What choice will you make?

Stephen Mathis ministers to the Schnectady Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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Pray for the Senate

Johnny Melton

holiness" (1 Timothy 2:1, 2).

It happened to tune in to the impeachment trial at lunch time one day this week as Lloyd John Olgivie, Chaplain of the Senate, in his rich baritone voice, opened the session with prayer. Hearing Dr. Olgivie pray reminded me of an anecdote that I had in my files concerning Edward Everett Hale who served as Senate Chaplain from 1903 to 1909. It was Edward Everett Hale who stirred individual accountability with the words: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something I can do."

As Chaplain of the Senate Hale was once asked, "Do you pray for the Senators, Dr. Hale?"

"No," he responded, "I look at the Senators and pray for the country!"

Perhaps now, as never before, we should do the same.

The Apostle Paul wrote to his son in the gospel, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and

holiness; the pagan Roman empire was the government; the despotic and deranged Nero was the emperor; corrupt government was the order of the day. World powers did not honor what was to become the Judeo-Christian code of morals and ethics. And Paul did not pray that the government would become the purveyors of public morality and chastity. He urged prayer on behalf of those in authority in order that Christians could "live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." The sooner we Christians commit ourselves to living our lives in all godliness and holiness, the sooner we will make an impact on our society.

Pray for all those in authority, to be sure, and if they provide "domestic tranquility," great; but whether or not we are able to do it peacefully and quietly, our call, as Christians, is to live "in all godliness and holiness" regardless.

Johnny Melton, a former editor of Carolina Christian, preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS. He can be contacted at 751 E. Westbrook St., West Point, MS 39773-3120.

— Mark Hudson

Omission Corrected
During the typesetting process the following section was accidentally omitted from the February edition of *Brotherhood News*:

KINGSTREE, SC...
Billy McVey reports a

successful "year at the Central Carolina School of Preaching. Staff and students participated in campaigns to Augusta, GA and Bishopville, SC. A campaign to Guyana, South America was conducted October 29-November 13 with seven participants from South

Carolina with 42 being baptized.

BATESBURG, SC...

Sam Soper has resigned as one of the elders for the Aiken, SC church of Christ in order to accept the preaching position for the church in Batesburg.

A Nightmare and a Dream

to put it mildly, I don't like cats! Jade and Ruby, my wife's cats, have been spayed. Maybe they'll be the last two to ever haunt our house.

My worst nightmare could come true if those cats could reproduce. On average a female cat can give birth at age nine months, and the typical litter numbers two males and two females. Suppose that Ruby gave birth to two female kittens and two male kittens when she was nine months old. And suppose that nine months later her two female kittens did the same. If this pattern continued for ten years, and none of the cats died, wandered off or even produced more than one litter, how many cats would terrorize my my home at the end of the decade? 32,766!

Cats proliferate in my worst nightmare, but they also illustrate one of God's great dreams for us.

Imagine that you tell several of your friends about Jesus this year, and four of them believe and are baptized. Imagine that two of them share the message with their friends, and eight more obey the gospel. Imagine that if the scenario keeps repeating itself nearly 33,000 people will come to know Jesus Christ by the year 2009 because you cared enough to share Him with a few of your friends this year!

Cats and Christians were both created to multiply.

When Jesus was arrested, "all the disciples deserted Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). No one disciple was willing to go with Him. NONE! Yet, less than two months later, 120 believers gathered together (Acts 1:15). These disciples' faith in Jesus had solidified when they saw Him alive again. On the first day that they publicly shared the good news, "those who accepted the message were baptized, and about three

Danny Boggs

thousand were added to their number that day"

(Acts 2:41). What's more, "the Lord kept adding to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Only a short time later the group had grown to include 5,000 men, not counting women and children (Acts 4:14). The church kept growing and growing and growing...

Jesus offered grace, mercy, peace, hope and love to those who became the first Christians. He offers all of it to us, too. And through us, He offers it all to our friends and family.

The early Christians were so in love with Jesus that even when persecution scattered them from their homes, they "preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4).

Cats quit reproducing when they lose the desire, and they lose the desire when they are spayed or neutered. Satan knows, too, that the most effective way to prevent the spread of faith in Christ is to remove passion for Christ from the hearts of Christians. When Jesus thought of what lay ahead for His disciples, He said, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). Everyday evil and temptation race to us down one avenue after another. How easy it is to lose our love.

"But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me" (Psalm 13:5-6). Dwell on the love of the Lord, and watch His dream for you, your youth group and your congregation come true!

Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791, or by e-mail at: dannyboggs@juno.com. Articles for this column are welcomed and encouraged.

Blue Ridge Church of Christ.....

there is now a new congregation serving the Black Mountain-Swannanoa region of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville. Located in Black Mountain, just off Interstate 40, the Blue Ridge Church of Christ was established in February, 1997 and currently enjoys a Sunday morning worship attendance of about 18.

The congregation began meeting in the home of a young woman named Kathy Cabe and soon afterwards moved to the Black Mountain Public Library. After a brief stay there, the church secured temporary arrangements for use of the Media Center at Black Mountain Primary School. Since then, the church has purchased a 3/4 acre lot with two dwellings, including a house. The purchase has placed a serious strain on the church's finances. The brethren are in immediate need of at least \$300 per month in continual support, or a one-time contribution of \$1,000 to help with the purchase of tables, chairs, carpet, and supplies for the repair and upgrading of the house and property. The Hendersonville church in

Hendersonville, NC, currently serves as the sponsoring church for this new work.

The congregation is served by Jim Hunter as its preacher. Jim has worked with churches in the Carolinas since 1975, most recently with the Biltmore church in Asheville, NC from 1989-1996. He is a bivocational preacher with the Blue Ridge church. Jim was first graduated from the Memphis School of preaching in 1974 and has since earned both the BS and MA degrees from Southern Christian University in Montgomery, AL.

Individuals or churches interested in helping this good work can write to the Blue Ridge Church of Christ, PO Box 1466, Black Mountain, NC 28711, or you may call Jim Hunter at (828) 665-2705.

When visiting in the Black Mountain-Swannanoa area, be sure to stop in and encourage these brothers and sisters. Sunday morning Bible study begins at 9:30 with worship following at 10:30. Sunday evening worship begins at 5:30 and the church comes together on Wednesday nights at 7:00.

ROCK HILL, SC...

The *Charlotte Avenue church of Christ* will host the "Carolina's Men's Retreat: A Rally for Truth and Right" on Saturday, March 13, 1999, 9 am-2 pm.

NASHVILLE, TN...

The Christian Chronicle reports that well-known author and law professor F. LaGard

Smith will join the Lipscomb University faculty in the fall as part of Lipcomb's new Scholars in Residence program. Smith will be leaving Pepperdine University where he has served on staff since 1972. Smith and his wife will continue to spend six months a year in England as he continues to write.

SLATER, SC...

The 55th annual Carolina Bible Lectures will be hosted by the Slater Marietta Church of Christ on April 5-8. This year's theme will be "Understanding a Scriptural Faith." For information please call Walter Wagner (864) 836-8309.

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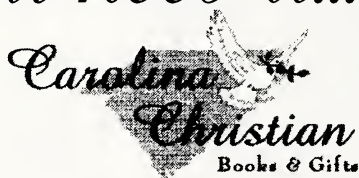
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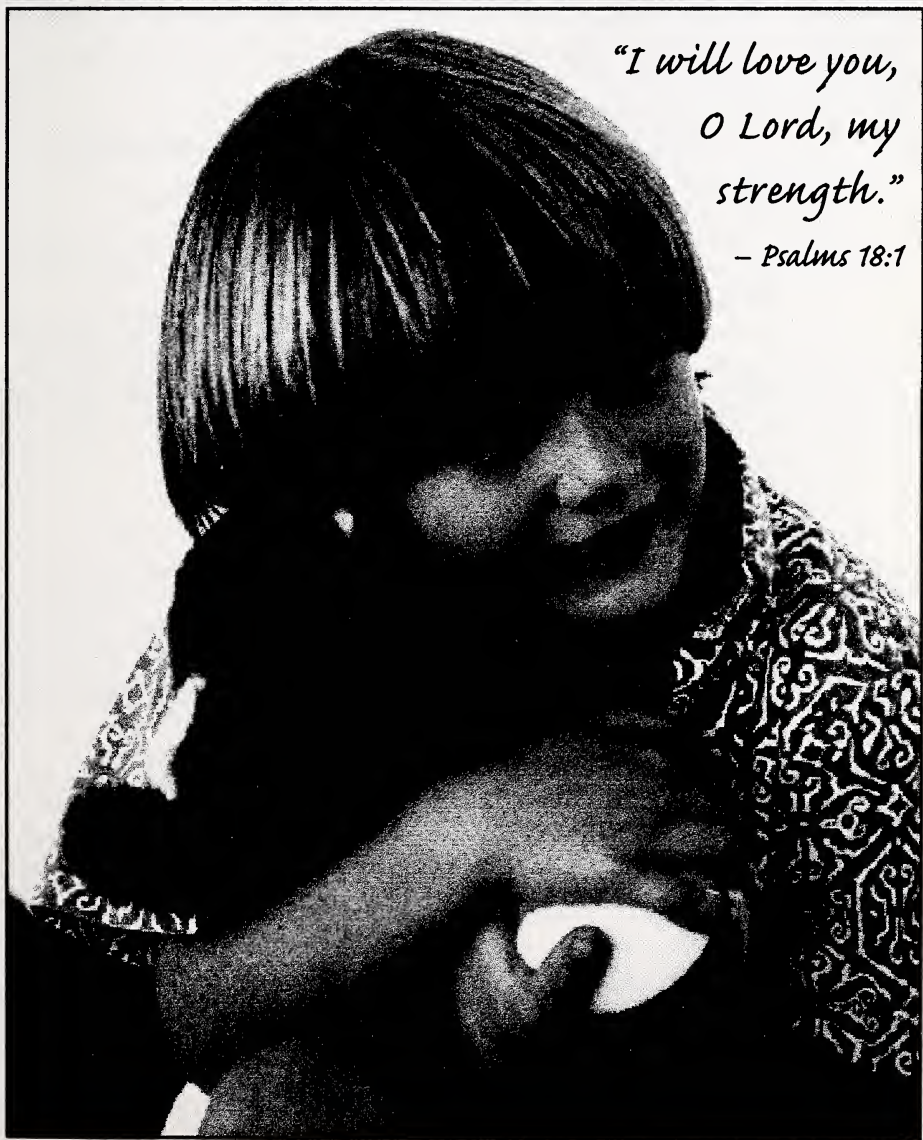
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*"I will love you,
O Lord, my
strength."*

— Psalms 18:1



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No Way to Run a Business.....

(Mathew 20:1-16)

I marvel at those people who seem to have a real knack for business.

Dennis Conner

of salvation.

People like Bill Gates amaze me. He not only knew something about computers, but he also knew what to do with that knowledge. He took his idea and turned it into a business. Now, his personal worth has been estimated at something like \$23 billion. Sam Walton had an idea. Instead of people running all over town to this store and that store for what they needed, what if everything was included in one big store? Put it all under one big roof and sell it a little cheaper than the other guy. The name of his idea? Wal-Mart. These guys, and countless others, knew how to run a business.

Then there are those people who want to be successful in business, who take the risk, but just don't have a clue what they're doing; like the guy who opened up a Barbecue house in the middle of an orthodox Jewish community. They don't understand the market, perhaps, or they don't grasp the concept of cash flow, or they start out with too little capital, or they build in the wrong part of town. In other words, they just don't know how to run a business. And I'll tell you someone else who doesn't know how to run a business, and that's God. Who says so? Jesus says so in the kingdom parable of the laborers in the vineyard. It's true, God doesn't know how to run a good business, but He does know how to run a Kingdom. The economics of business are lost on God, but fortunately for us He wrote the book on the economics

Unfortunately, not only the world, but even the church has always struggled with the economics of the kingdom of heaven. During the presidency of Ronald Reagan we kept hearing about "trickle down economics," but there were a lot of experts who didn't buy into it. Well, God practices something we might call "upside down" economics, and many are simply scandalized by it. It is an economy that is fueled by the currency of grace.

The Setting

Prior to the telling of the parable Jesus had demonstrated the danger of trusting in riches and the impossibility of entering the kingdom by one's own resources and efforts. A wealthy young man had come to Jesus asking, "What shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16). It was a good question; the right question. Jesus' initial response, initially, was "Be obedient to the law of God." The young man responded that he had pretty much done that since he was a boy. Still, he felt that something was lacking. Then Jesus dropped a bombshell on him, "Sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and follow me." The young man went away sorrowing, because he had a lot of money and things. Jesus had struck at the true affections of the young man's heart.

He then told the disciples, "...It's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven...it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle..." (Matt. 19:23-24). When the disciples heard Him say this, they

were shocked. "Well, if they can't be saved, then who can?" (19:25). The Lord then informed them that the only possibility of entering is by God's gracious power (19:26). Hearing that, Peter then blurted out, "Look, we have left everything behind and followed You!" It's as if he actually thought he could impress Jesus with that bold declaration. Then he asked the Lord, "What shall we have?" (19:27). That is, in view of all that *we* have sacrificed, all that *we* have done, all that *we* have committed, what is our place in the kingdom going to be? What's going to be in it for us? Peter would have been a great union man.

Jesus then acknowledged that they would indeed have a notable place in the kingdom and that those who had sacrificed would indeed be blessed by the Lord (19:28-29), but then He added this strange statement, "But many who are first shall be last, and the last first" (19:30). What did He mean by that? Jesus explained by telling this most unusual story.

The Story (Matthew 20:1-16)

Early in the morning a landowner went down to where the day laborers were gathered. He picked the men he wanted and agreed on a fair price for their work that day. A little later he returned to the marketplace for more help, telling the selected workers simply that "whatever is right I will pay you." They didn't argue and headed for the vineyard. They assumed that they would be treated fairly. At noon and then again at 3:00 in the afternoon the landowner repeated his actions, securing more workers for his Carolina Christian

vineyard. Then, surprisingly, he returned one more time to the marketplace at 5:00 p.m., just one hour before quitting time. There were a few more hangers—one standing idle, but for that last hour they, too, were sent into the vineyard after being told, "whatever is right you will receive."

Quitting time arrived and all the workers gathered to receive their wages. The last hour workers were the first to be paid. Surely it wouldn't be much, but it would be better than nothing! Imagine the shock of those last hour workers when they received the equivalent of a full day's pay! Dollar—oops, denarius—signs lit up the eyes of the other workers and those hired first figured that they would receive, perhaps, twelve days' wages for one. Then, imagine *their* shock when they, too, received a denarius. Understandably, they protested. Had there been a labor board, a complaint would have been filed.

The landowner replied that he was simply paying them what they had agreed on. They weren't being cheated at all. And besides, did he not have the right to do whatever he wanted in his own vineyard?

And So . . .

The parable is a total reversal of normal values. Regardless of our claims to understand grace, many of us still find ourselves in the role of the disgruntled laborers. We like to think of ourselves as responsible, hard workers in the kingdom. We sing "Will there be any stars in my crown?" and we think to ourselves, "You bet there will be!" And then we find ourselves comparing our stars to those of others; our goodness to

the goodness of others; our labors to the labors of others. And we find ourselves thinking in terms of what we deserve for all our sacrifices and labors. We find ourselves asking, "Therefore, what shall we have?" Then, when we hear this story the employer's strange behavior baffles us just as it did the original hearers, and in we miss the point of the story: God dispenses gifts, not wages.

The point Jesus was making to Peter, and to us, is that our standing in the kingdom of God does not depend on our human merit in any way whatsoever. It is not depending on our goodness, but the goodness of the God who accepts those who could never be good enough in themselves. As Michael Green writes, "Nobody can claim deserved membership in the kingdom". Our membership depends on the undeserved, unearned grace and goodness of God! Grace cannot be calculated like a day's wages. We receive grace as a gift from God, not as something we toil to earn. There is no basis for

questioning how this generous God handles the utterly undeserving. "Just as sin is the great equalizer that causes every man to 'fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23), God's grace is the great equalizer that removes sin and makes every believer equally acceptable to Him in Christ" (John MacArthur).

The whole idea of merit is alien to the kingdom mentality. That is precisely why, as Jesus said, so many who think of themselves as first shall actually be last, and the last will be first. Those who think they deserve a place in the kingdom because of their labors and sacrifices will be humbled by the Lord, and those on the other hand who are already humbled by their sin and realize that they have nothing of worth to lay before the Lord and are willing to trust His mercy and gratefully accept His gift will be exalted. And it doesn't matter when they come into the kingdom or where they come from! Grace is the great equalizer.

That's no way to run a business, but it's a great way to run a kingdom.

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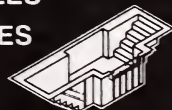
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Into the Vacuum.....

Stan Helton

It was two days before Thanksgiving and my family and I visited the newest mall in town. Thanksgiving, though not even here yet, was already forgotten. Christmas tunes filled the air. Beautiful decorations delight our eyes and a Santa (with real whiskers) sits on his throne in the strategic center of the mall to receive petitions from wide-eyed boys and girls and anyone else who wanted a picture with Ol' Saint Nick and was willing to pay the \$7.95 and up for the photo.

Does anyone else see what is wrong with this scene?

You might think I'm just another cynic (read: Scrooge) who can't see the wonders of Christmas or maybe one of those folks who won't celebrate Christmas because it's not in the Bible. Really my concern is deeper than this. Our experience at the mall at Christmas time was that of a supposed "religious" holiday that had been co-opted by the culture of consumerism and commercialism.

Gordon Scoville, author of *Into the Vacuum: Being the Church in a Age of Barbarism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), argues that the American church (broadly speaking) is deeply tied to American culture. Secondly, American culture is deteriorating rapidly. Thirdly, and consequently, the church's identity has eroded to the point that today it often stands for nothing. In other words, professing Christians have become unable to distinguish Christian values from those of American culture. Scoville offers several vignettes within the context of his religious

fellowship to illustrate his point:

- On Easter Sunday the assembled worshipers barely fill half the available seating space. After the service one of the congregation's old-timers reflect, "We used to be the only show in town. But now it's hard to compete with a basketball game on TV."
- A deacon motions me to the side of the meeting room. He expresses confusion. "Sometimes people ask what our church stands for. I don't know how to answer them."
- Early on Friday morning the treasurer, a prominent member of a powerful family within the congregation, comes to my office to propose imminent baptisms for several of his kin. "I don't know how you feel about it," he queries, "but we would like the baptisms to be a special family moment. Do they have to be a part of Sunday service?"
- During the preparation for Sunday the song leader confronts me: "Preacher, Memorial Day weekend is coming up. Why can't we sing patriotic hymns?"

(All vignettes adapted from pp. 12-13.)

Can you see, from a Christian viewpoint, what's wrong with each of the above stories? Scoville charges that the church in America has lost its "Christian" identity. We have forgotten that we were created to worship God, that Christians are by definition "disciples" and that truth sometimes offends (pp. 51-52). He offers the following items to test his hypothesis:

- Churches today generally do not

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articulate covenant expectations for membership.

- “Christianity” is thus reduced to the lowest common denominator; each person can believe privately what—ever he or she chooses as long as no attempts were made to bind together around shared beliefs.
- Correspondingly, responsibility and accountability are rare if not altogether non-existent.
- No spiritual, religious or faith criteria are applied when it comes to weddings, funerals, or baptism.
- Leaders of the local church consider one of the strengths of the church the “coffee and goodies time” that “builds fellowship.”
- At the same time, leaders complain of widespread apathy toward the church—apathy demonstrated by stagnant worship attendance, recycling of volunteers through various ministries, and the like.

[Adapted from pp. 54-55]

While Scoville himself admits that no one church exhibits all of these, he admits that this overriding trend is clear in most “mainline” denominations in America.

Scoville also postulates that, “Evangelism in America will be harder than most of us ever imagined, for the reason that we ourselves are so largely captured by a status quo that depends for its existence on the destruction of [the] Christian mission” (p. 11). More simply, making disciples is disruptive to the tranquility of a church

Carolina Christian

used to, and content with, making church members.

The challenge before us is real. Scoville suggests that the way out is for the Church

**“Further,
instead of being
rooted in this
world, the church
must be both
Christ-centered
and
cross-centered.”**

to be(come) the Church. Our hope is for the Church not only to teach the right things but to do “right by Jesus Christ.” We must unashamedly and resolutely, “affirm a distinctive Christian identity.”

With these observations in mind, I want to suggest several areas where we can resist the prevalent culture and so be more of what Jesus had in mind.

First of all, there is no need to be ashamed of Christianity’s exclusivist claims. There is only ONE truth. But in our society everything is tolerated except “intolerance.” There is little room for one unifying center of reality: God. Certainly Christians disagree regarding certain tenets and practices of faith, but there are core beliefs which must be in place before one

can be called "Christian." These include the deity of Jesus, the historical reality of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and the absolute claim Jesus makes on his followers.

Also, a basic loyalty to community must be restored in the church. I expect the far-away corporate bank to treat me as a number, but I don't expect the same in the church. Modern urban living is characterized by freedom, anonymity, marginality, migration, and constant change. What better challenge to this than being a covenant community, where people do keep their word and where people know each other. The New Testament church is a place of "one another," where the good of the community is weighed with every individual's decision.

Third, the church must quit measuring success by worldly standards of respectability. Golden Girl Estelle Getty once commented that just because she had been married a long time didn't mean it was good. In church, "bigger" is not necessarily faithful. This certainly is not to say that big is bad. It is to say that bigness is not to be the primary issue, nor is bigness a certain sign of God's blessing. When Jesus praised the Pharisees for their careful attention to the Mosaic law, he still found them wanting in the major issues: justice, mercy and faithfulness. What if these really are the signs of success? By the way, they are!

Further, instead of being rooted in this world, the church must be both Christ-centered and cross-centered. These two are

actually more of a paradox. Christ-centered focuses on the triumph of God in overcoming evil. Cross-centered is a reminder of the humiliating cost of that triumph. The Church, like the apostle Paul, must "carry bodily the marks of Jesus" and so demonstrate "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me (us), and I (we) to the world" (Galatians 6:14, 17).

Finally, we must not forget that our primary purpose is to worship God. That is the church's highest calling. We must be wary of falling head-long into the "seeker sensitive" mode which flips true worship on its head by proposing that unbelievers determine what takes place in the public assembly of the church. Biblically, only believers worship the true God. And as we worship, we must offer to the Lord the best of our hearts and abilities. He deserves no less.

Unless we in the churches of Christ shake loose from the dominant culture and reclaim our theological center and our biblical heritage, we too will be sucked into the vacuum of the dominant culture. If we accept the values of the world, we can only have a "sub-normal" Christian existence at best. And like "the frog in the kettle," we will have lost our capacity to see it.

Stan Helton serves the Carrollton Ave. church in New Orleans, LA. He can be contacted at 4540 S. Carrollton Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70119.

The Church of Today

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12, NKJV).

Mark Littleton

vibrant part of the body of Christ now, but if that is

going to be the case Paul says there are two things you must do.

First, you must let no one despise or look down on your youth. The idea is that you must not conduct yourself in such a way that others who are watching you life could do just that. If you demonstrate by your attitude and actions a level of immaturity, then others will be led to look down on your youth and conclude that you don't have much to offer the Lord or His church right now.

Second, you must be an example to the believers. You have often been told to look to the right kind of people to be your

We have all heard that young people are the church of tomorrow. I agree with that, in one sense. You are certainly going to be the Bible class teachers, song leaders, preachers, deacons, and elders of tomorrow; and the church needs to encourage and train you in that regard. In another sense, however, I disagree. If you are a Christian, you are part of the church today! And consequently, you do not need to wait until some time in the future to be active and effective in the Lord's service. You can be a

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models and that, no doubt, is crucial to your spiritual growth and development. Interestingly, though, Paul does not tell young people to look to the Christians around them as role models, but rather to *be* role models to *them*. How often in your local church have you been given that challenge to be an example to the rest of the church? How much more could you do for the Lord's cause if adults expressed that kind of interest and confidence in you? Remind them of their responsibility!

Paul then lists six areas in which you are to be a role model: in word (in what you say and how you say it), in conduct (what you do and where you go), in love (how you treat others and how you respond when others mistreat you), in spirit (your attitude and disposition), in faith (what you believe and how strongly you believe

it), and in purity (your desire to maintain a spotless life before God to His honor and glory).

I love young people. I'm filled with confidence about the future of the Lord's church as I watch your lives. But I am equally enthused about the state of the body of Christ right now because of you. Young people, live so that others will not look down on you because you are young. Rather, live so that they will praise God for your dependability and maturity. Make it your goal to be examples in your local churches in these six areas.

Remember, you are not just the church of the future; you are the church of today!

Mark Littleton serves the Central Haywood church and can be contacted at P.O. Box 219, Clyde, NC 28721.

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Randy Gore

your life about the sinfulness
of sex outside marriage, so

Free from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, NIV).

As a teen you probably know about the physical dangers and consequences of sex outside of marriage. You learn about it at church, at school, from television, and from reading. You have heard about the health and even life threatening consequences of sexually transmitted diseases. You are bombarded with information from these and other sources about abstinence, virginity, "safe sex," and other issues. You hear it so much that those of us who plan youth programs and study materials sometimes hear from teens, "Just don't talk about sex; that's all we ever hear about." Even as you read this article some of you are probably thinking, "not another lecture on sex." The point of this is not to give a lecture, but just to give you some info; and more importantly, to offer the very thoughts of God from Scripture so that you can make decision and set standards for yourself as you are led by God to do His will. In all things (not just sex) real love for God is seen when our will becomes the same as God's (and not the other way around, I may add).

You've probably heard several times in Carolina Christian

you likely don't need to hear a lot about that. Hopefully, you already know it. For your own study (so you can make your own decisions that are not based merely on what others tell you) here are some other verses relating to sexual immorality (fornication; sex outside of marriage): 1 Corinthians 6:9; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8; and Revelation 21:8.

Consider also this important information: "Young people today need to be taught that premarital sex is risky business. The public school and media campaign urging young people to use condoms to have safe sex... is a big lie!... There are two principles that all young people need to know: (1) Whenever you have sex with a person it is the same health risk as having sex with all the people that person had sex with, (2) Condoms are not safe! Even the manufacturers do not claim condoms are safe, but admit to a failure or breakage rate of anywhere from 4 to 14 percent... Even when condoms are used every time, they are not safe... In one test of married couples that used condoms every time they had sex, 10 percent of the women got pregnant. Evidently the sperm were able to penetrate the pores of the condom. That is a scary fact, for the germs that cause STDs are even smaller than sperm." (Tim and Beverly LaHaye, *Raising Sexually Pure Kids*, Multnomah Publishers, 1998, pp. 205-206).

While knowledge about STDs and the

possibilities of condoms failing can be a deterrent from having sex, *this should not be the real reason that you as a Christian teen refrain from sex!* If it were possible for

you to have sex and be 100 percent sure that pregnancy or infection would never occur, that should have nothing to do with whether or not you have sex. There are obviously ways to be pretty sure that you can have sex and keep a pregnancy from occurring. You can take the precautions and be somewhat confident that you can have sex and protect yourself from a disease. The fact remains, though, that as a child of

God the reason to be pure is not protection from pregnancy and/or disease, but to glorify God! As the passage at the beginning of this article states, the reason to flee from sexual immorality is because you were bought at a huge price (Jesus' life!) and God's Spirit lives in your body. To have sex outside of God's will is to shame yourself and God. God wants us to honor Him with our bodies.

After Paul reminded the Christians in Rome of their commitment to Christ and His gospel in their baptisms and the resulting freedom from sin, he wrote, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in our mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the

members of your body to sin as instruments of righteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of

righteousness to God" (Romans 6:12-13, NASB). If you have sex outside of marriage you are using your body as a instrument of sin instead of an instrument for God. Giving in to these temptations will keep God from being as effective in your life as He wants to be. This is the real reason to live a sexually pure life. The question for a Christian teen should not be, "Can I prevent

disease and pregnancy?" Rather, the desire should be, "I will be used to glorify God." Living like this will make the worries of disease and pregnancy unnecessary.

Hopefully as a Christian teen you do not have to worry about disease, pregnancy, and virginity at all because you are a virgin and are committed to staying that way until marriage, which leads me to address another temptation that may be even more challenging: how far can you go with someone without having sex and still be pleasing to God? A few years ago David Lewis, Carley Dodd and Darryl Tippens of Abilene Christian University conducted a study of teens in churches of Christ. Their research found that 71.5

"God wants us to honor Him with our bodies."

percent of the youth surveyed (ages 12–20) had remained virgins. This may be considered encouraging since national norms based on other surveys showed that only 40 percent of “non-religious” teens were virgins. Out of those in the church who had lost their virginity, 90 percent of them were in a steady dating relationship when they committed fornication (David Lewis, Carley Dodd and Darryl Tippens, *Shattering the Silence*, Gospel Advocate, 1989). *This is one reason that setting your standards with God’s will and not compromising them is so important.* Realize that the more you like someone, seriously date someone, or think you love someone, the more you need to remind yourself of God’s will regarding sex.

Although the results of this research show that Christian teens are much more likely to remain virgins than non-Christian teens, the research also revealed another problem among teens in the church: 75 percent admitted to intimate touching and fondling. In other words, although 71.5 percent had never had intercourse, only 25 percent had never engaged in sexual touching. While these teens were concerned with virginity, they apparently believed it to be okay to participate in “foreplay” if they didn’t have intercourse. These teens were “technical virgins,” which means that anything goes short of actual

“**t**he fact remains, though, that as a child of God the reason to be pure is not protection from pregnancy and/or disease, but to glorify God!

intercourse.

Listen up parents and other adults.

Lewis, Dodd and Tippens write that “the practice of technical virginity suggests that our teaching on sexual purity may be poorly understood, if not flawed. Many of our young people are first-class scribes and Pharisees when it

comes to sexual purity” (*Shattering the Silence*, pp. 9–10). Teenagers, realize that this is also a sin against God and yourself. This is part of what the Bible calls debauchery, lasciviousness, or sensuality (2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19). Also, doing this violates God’s will that you “abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, NKJV). In other words, God wants you to keep away from doing sinful things instead of seeing how close you can get without doing it. When people take part in giving and/or receiving these types of affections and pleasures they are trying to get as close to sex as possible without actually having it and are being legalistic about virginity. As a result, God’s will is violated. Another consequence is that the person is toying with his or her own emotional and spiritual condition as well as that of the other person. Lust does this, while genuine love for both God and the other person does not.

So, what should all of this mean to you as a Christian teen? Set your standards on God's standards. Remember to glorify God in everything—including dating and other relationships. Decide ahead of time what you are going to do when confronted with the possibility of being sexually tempted (and you *will* most likely be confronted at some point). The time to decide how far to go is not when your date is kissing you or makes other advances. Pray about it and *decide now* what you will do.

Parents, please talk honestly with your teens (or better yet, your younger children) about these things. Help them

set their sexual standards and let them know they are free to talk openly with you or other Christian adults. Help them to understand that sex is a wonderful gift from God and is a great blessing in the context of a committed, lifelong relationship.

Remember, "do all to the glory of God."

Randy Gore is a native South Carolinian and currently serves as Youth Minister with the Edgewood church in Columbus, Georgia. He can be contacted at 4102 Macon Rd., Columbus, GA 31907, or by e-mail at: RNGore@juno.com.

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In Search of Renewal: Part 2

Disciples of Christ

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Phil Stapp

and children, his brothers and sisters--yes,

even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

"In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me" (John 12:26).

Over the past few decades, the world has learned much about discipleship, but not from Christians. The world has been shocked by Islamic terrorists who are willing to go to any length, even death, in the service of Allah. The Persian Gulf War showed the world what Muslims are willing to do and suffer if they believe that it is the will of Allah. This is the kind of commitment that is demanded by Christ and yet is lacking in so many Christian's lives.

The true beginning of spiritual renewal is found in the decision to be a disciple of Christ. Let us listen to Jesus as he describes what it means to be his disciple.

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:23-26).

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife

Carolina Christian

In these passages Jesus calls us to total commitment to him alone. We must accept him as both Savior and Lord of our lives. Many desire to call him Savior, fewer desire to make him Lord of their lives. To make him Lord means to deny self and everything else to follow him in faith and obedience. If we are to escape self and become absorbed in the love of God and others, we must give ourselves completely to Jesus. As David Watson observes:

"How can we expect anything less than this kind of total commitment if we are to see Christ's revolution of love changing the world of today? To say, 'No Lord! is a contradiction in terms, yet many within the Christian church want the comfortable compromise of conditional discipleship. The bottom line is our wish to have the final word, to decide when to say yes and when to say no. But the

truth is uncomfortably clear: if Christ is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all. It is impossible to be a partial disciple of Jesus."

It will help us to understand being disciples of Christ if we examine his life and ministry. In studying the Gospels I see three areas of Jesus' life that stand out, preparation, service and mission, and love and sacrifice. While we often discuss the ministry of Jesus (his teaching, his service, his healing, etc.), we seldom discuss his preparation to do those things. He demonstrates as a twelve-year-old in the Temple that he has already been preparing himself for his ministry. After his baptism by John, he spends a month and a half in solitude and fasting. As his ministry proceeded, he often spent the entire night in solitude and prayer before serving the needs of others the following day.

If this kind of preparation was necessary for Jesus, how much more is it necessary for his disciples? We cannot expect to follow Jesus in a life of service and sacrifice unless we prepare ourselves to do so. How we do this will be the subject of the next article in this series.

Out of Christ's life of preparation flowed a life of service and mission. The Gospels draw a picture of Jesus that is compassionate and hurting over the condition of man. He is constantly reaching out to comfort the sick and down trodden. He does not do this just to make people or himself feel better, it is always done to show the world the depth of God's love and prepare it to hear the message of the Good News. His miracles and acts of love and mercy were always pointing people to the

great love of God and the power of his message. He never used them to manipulate people but they did serve as powerful illustrations of what he was trying to teach them.

To be disciples of Christ, we must have the same commitment to service and mission. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to follow him to the hurting, the poor, and the sick as well as to the rich and comfortable. To each we must show love and concern, but we must not stop short of dealing with their greatest need, to be saved from sin. Helping those in need is not done to manipulate them into becoming members of our church, but to open their hearts to the power of the Good News so that it can transform their lives.

Jesus was able to lead a life of service and mission because his life was a living sacrifice to God. He became a sacrifice because of his love for the Father and for the world. He devoted his life to doing the will of his Father and sacrificed his family, a home, a good profession, and any semblance of a normal life. His love and sacrifice are most vividly demonstrated at the cross. Though he pleaded with God in the garden to find another way, his sacrificial love led him to say, "your will be done." He allowed himself to be taken away and crucified. To follow Jesus is to follow him to the cross.

The cross is the symbol of the essence of Christianity and discipleship because it is the symbol of sacrificial love. To take up our crosses and follow Jesus is to say to God, "your will be done." The life of Christ was one of total commitment, sacrifice and love. To be his disciple is to live this same life. David Watson writes:

“Christians in the west have largely neglected what it means to be Disciples of Christ. The vast majority of Western Christians, church-members, pew-fillers, hymn-singers, sermon-tasters, Bible-readers, even born-again-believers or Spirit-filled-Charismatics, are not true disciples of Jesus. If we were willing to become disciples, the church in the West would be transformed, and the impact on society would be staggering. And this is no idle claim. In the first century, a tiny handful of inexperienced, timid disciples initiated, in the power of the Spirit, the greatest spiritual revolution the world has ever known. Within

three centuries, even the mighty Roman Empire yielded to the power of the gospel of Christ.”

The great plea of the Restoration Movement has always been to be “Christians only.” To do so we must follow Christ only. This means we will prepare ourselves for ministry and then live a life of service and mission. Our love for God will give us the willingness to sacrifice self and follow Jesus. It will be our greatest desire to do the will of our Father in heaven. At that point our lives, the church and the world will be changed.

Phil Stapp serves the Brewer Rd. Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27012.

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ROCK HILL, SC...

The *Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ* hosted the Carolina Men's Fellowship on March 13. C.W. Bradley was unable to speak as originally planned due to his wife's illness. James Meadows and Clayton Winters substituted for Brother Bradley.

MARRIETA, SC...

Palmetto Bible Camp will host its first annual Spring Youth Rally on May 21-23. Six week of regular summer camp will begin on June 13. The Fall Youth Rally at camp will be September 17-19.

YADKINVILLE, NC...

The *Yadkinville Church of Christ* will host the annual Small Church Workshop on May 20 & 21. This year's theme will be "More Prescriptions For Church Health." On March 14 the church confirmed *Thomas Willard, Eddie Ridings, Ray Rawley* and *Dennis Conner* as elders. The congregation had been without elders for eighteen years.

BATESBURG, SC...

The *Twin City Church of Christ* will have *Mike Hinrichs* speaking in a gospel meeting on April 30-May 1. In conjunction with this meeting the congrega-

tion will celebrate its 10th anniversary. For information, please contact Sam Soper at (803) 685-5163.

BLACK MTN., NC...

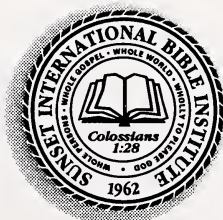
The 49th Annual *Blue Ridge Encampment* will be conducted June 7-11 at the YMCA's Blue Ridge Assembly. The theme this year is "Mountaintop Moments With the Master." Featured speakers will be *Jimmy Adcox, C. Bruce White, Wayne Kilpatrick, Randy Moody* and *Barry Stephens*. For information, or to make reservations, contact: Wallace Johnson, 1420 Verde Trail, Dothan, AL 36303; or call (334) 793-5890.

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*Heart Cries:
The Language of Prayer
from the Psalms*



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The Language of the Heart.....

Prayer. It's a simple thing, but not really. We all know we need to do it, but we all admit that we don't do it enough. We all want to do it well, but most of us struggle with how. We know that it's essential to our spiritual vitality and well-being, but we take it for granted and neglect its power. We all know what it is, we think.

Prayer is "communication with God." An answer that is trite enough. We try again. Prayer is talking with God. Closer. Prayer is the language of the heart that longs for God. Yes. And nowhere in

Dennis Conner

Scripture do we find that language as passionately and clearly expressed as in the Psalms. The book of Psalms is truly the believer's prayer book. It's just that too few of us take the time to mine the resources for prayer that await our discovery and claim in the Psalms.

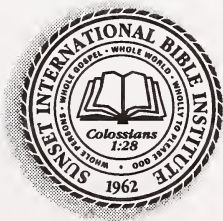
In this issue of *Carolina Christian* we focus on the language of prayer as seen in the Psalms. It is our hope that the three theme articles will not only inform, but also challenge your perceptions of prayer and will in some way serve to strengthen your own prayer relationship with God.

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Compassion for the Lost

Ron Newberry

the news programs ran video of avalanches in the Austrian Alps back in late February. They caused dozens of deaths. Thousands of dollars and hundreds of man-hours were spent searching for victims. Rescuers went without sleep, ate quickly and braved harsh conditions, risking their own lives to find anyone who might still be alive. Amidst the dozens of dead they found one little four-year-old boy who had been buried for two hours in the snow. You could see the exhilaration on the faces of the rescuers. You could hear their joy and witness the results of their teamwork. They had one objective, rescue the perishing.

During winter's last gasp in a snowstorm in New England, a little nine-year old boy named Corey Anderson in Norton, Massachusetts became lost in the blinding snow when he ran into the woods after his dog. Hundreds of rescuers were out in force searching for the little boy along with dogs and helicopters outfitted with infrared cameras. They found him three days later curled up on the riverbank.

A mother, her daughter and a high school friend were lost somewhere in Yosemite National Park in February. Dozens of rangers and law enforcement officers and the FBI were out in mass trying to find them using dogs, helicopters and searching on foot. Unfortunately they were all dead when they were found.

Those are three scenarios of lost people. Luke 15 presents three more scenarios of lost things representing lost people. None

are lost in avalanches or in the woods during a

snowstorm or in a national park, but they're still lost and still in danger. Jesus presents three vivid scenarios about a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. We need to understand how these parables relate to reclaiming the lost.

Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost." He came to find and restore the lost, to rescue the perishing. By definition, disciples of Jesus Christ are those who have made a commitment to God to do his will. They are constantly trying to learn about the master Jesus so they can then learn to do what the master did. If his decisive mission, his supreme goal, his ultimate agenda was to seek and save the lost, then what should our agenda, our goal, our mission be? That's right. We are to be about the business of sending out search parties and being part of the sent out to locate and rescue the lost.

Those rescuers in the Alps have one thing so many of us seem to have lost. They have a compassion for the lost. If we are going to reclaim the lost, the first thing we must do is discover a compassion for the perishing. Luke 15:1-7 says, "Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were

all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' Then Jesus told them this parable: 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open

country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors

together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Sheep were kept in communal flocks. They were all mixed during the day and brought back to the safety of the sheepfold during the

night. They were able to separate them because each sheep knew his master's voice.

Shepherds were completely responsible for their sheep—every one of their sheep. If a sheep got sick, the shepherd took care of it. If one got injured, the shepherd tended its wounds. If one got lost, the shepherd would leave his flock in the care of the other communal shepherds and track it down.

It wasn't unusual for the shepherds and their sheep to come home to their village late in the afternoon with a missing shepherd who was out on the hillside searching for a lost sheep. When he found him, he would lay him across his shoulders and take him home. The village would be waiting for his return and would cheer and shout for joy when the lost sheep was

brought home.

Out of this piece of real first century life, what do we learn that's critical to reclaiming the lost? I said we must discover

**"We can't
turn on the porch
light and expect
them to find their
way home."**

a compassion for the lost. What does that mean? It means that we must be willing to spend the time, put in the effort and pay the price to search for the lost sheep of God. We can't turn on the porch light and expect them to find their way home. We have to go get them. We need to develop strategies that will send some out to find the lost sheep and

those who stay home ought to be cheering when they are found.

Galatians 6:1f says, "Brothers if you find someone trapped in sin, *restore* (Emphasis mine; "restore" is the word for setting a broken bone) him gently. Carry each other's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ."

A doctor gently sets a broken leg. A shepherd gently retrieves a lost lamb. And when the village sees the sheep has been reclaimed they rejoice. We must discover the compassion for the strays that compels us to search until we find them and then celebrate, and cheer their return. If we don't search for the strays, we at least ought to cheer their return. What level of compassion do you have for the lost?

The Language of Praise

the past several years have seen a welcomed and renewed emphasis on praise in our worship assemblies. One would think that praise would come naturally to a worship assembly, but that has not always been the case. One would also think that praise comes naturally to prayer, but neither has that always been the case. If the truth be known, our personal prayers, and perhaps even our public prayers, are often more about ourselves than our God. In the Psalms we find that praise is an indispensable element of the believer's relationship with God. To know God is to praise Him, and in the Psalter there are two primary reasons for which praise is the appropriate response to the Lord.

Praise Him for His Greatness

As we turn our attention to the Psalms, God is often praised for who He is; that is, for His character and nature. For instance, in Psalm 47:1-2 there is celebratory praise in response to the awesomeness of the Lord:

**Oh, clap your hands, all
you peoples!
Shout to God with the
voice of triumph!
For the LORD Most High is
awesome;
He is a great King over all
the earth.**

In Psalm 99:1-3 the people are called upon to praise God for His transcendent holiness:

**The LORD reigns;
Let the peoples tremble!**

Dennis Conner

**He dwells between
the cherubim;**

**Let the earth be moved!
The LORD is great in Zion,
And He is high above all
the peoples.
Let them praise Your great
and awesome name—
He is holy.**

Psalm 92:1-2 declares that His lovingkindness and faithfulness are constants of God's character that should elicit our thanks and gratitude:

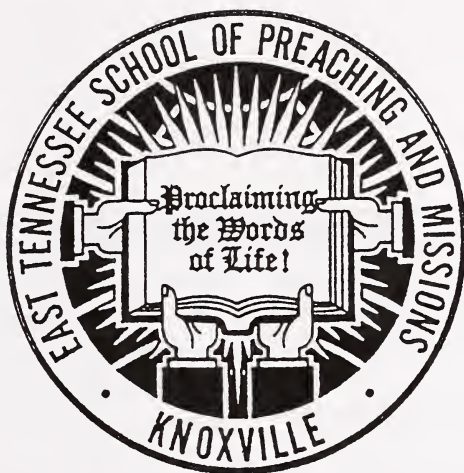
**It is good to give thanks to
the LORD,
And to sing praises to Your
name, O Most High;
To declare Your lovingkind-
ness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness
every night...**

Who is God? He is "the LORD" who "is great and greatly to be praised" (Psalm 96:4).

Praising the Deeds of God

In the Psalms we find that the character of God expresses itself in the works—the deeds—of the Almighty. Indeed, the people are exhorted, "Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things..." (Psalm 98:1a). Among the many marvelous things that God has done are His redemptive mercies. In Psalm 103:2-4 David was prompted to exclaim,

Bless the LORD, O my soul,



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**And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your
iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from
destruction,
who crowns you with
lovingkindness and tender
mercies...**

Also among the great works calling forth praise for the Lord is the redemption of His people, which is a common theme in

“The Primary benefit of praise is that it causes a shift in focus: from ourselves to God.”

the psalms (an example of which can be found in Psalms 66:5-7). Further, the creative

power of God, who “lays the beams of His upper chambers in the water, who makes the clouds His chariot... Who laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever... (and) appointed the moon for seasons,” as we read in Psalm 104, is more than ample reason to exclaim, “O LORD, how manifold are Your works” (Psalm 104:24a).

In Psalm 116:1 the poet bursts forth with this declaration of love, “I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications.” He acknowledges, “For You delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling” (Psalm 116:8). Because God has answered his prayer, the petitioner vows, “I will offer to

You the sacrifice of thanksgiving...” (Psalm 116:17a). Yes, praise the Lord, the God who hears our petitions, and hearing, has the power to do something about it!

Praise and Prayer

For the believer today prayer is enhanced and renewed when it incorporates the language of praise. The primary benefit of praise in prayer is that it causes a shift in focus: from ourselves to our God. This is not to suggest that there is no place for personal petitions in prayer. Rather, it is to say that once our primary focus is fixed on the Lord, we are then more fully persuaded than ever before that He can in fact do something about our petitions.

Spend time getting to know the God revealed in the Psalms. His image there is broad and sweeping, multidimensional. He is not a small God, but the King of kings, dwarfing all other gods. He is found in these poems to be love, yet dispenses justice; He is the Lord who redeems His people, but condemns those who would exalt themselves. And as you get to know Him better in the Psalms, be awed by Him, falling to your knees. And then, praise Him. Celebratory praise. Humble praise. Fearful praise. Loving praise. Worshipful praise.

We call out, “Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer,” and when He answers according to His character, we acknowledge His great deed by proclaiming, “So I will sing praise to Your name forever...” (Psalm 66:1, 8a).

Amen.

"My God, My God": Prayer and Lament in the Psalms

the most common type of psalm in the book of Psalms is the *lament*.

Laments are cries of deep distress with earnest, passionate pleas to God for help. Listen to some of the more familiar cries and pleas from the Psalms:

Paul Watson

I suspect that our very familiarity with the laments

causes us take them and their language for granted. Yet how audacious such words are! The laments say openly what we may only dare to think privately; that life is hard and often unfair, even—perhaps *especially*—for God's people; that we are weak; unable to care for our own needs or solve our own problems; that God ought to do something about our distress and grief.

Why we have difficulty saying these things aloud to God and to one another I'm not sure. It may have something to do with the mistaken assumption that God expects us to be "polite." It may have something to do (although I hope that it does not) with a lack of conviction that God is real and that he truly knows and cares about us personally. Whatever the reason or reasons, how liberating and refreshing it is to hear the people of God unburden themselves to him!

That unburdening, of course, is found not only in the Psalms but throughout Scripture. Israel in Egypt "groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God" (Exodus 2:23). "In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD" (1 Samuel 1:10), to the point that Eli the priest thought that she was drunk. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" hurt so much that "three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me" (2 Corinthians 12:8). Jesus, in agony, prayed, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take

**Out of the depths I cry to
you, O LORD,
O LORD, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.
(Psalm 130:1-2)**

**Have mercy on me, O GOD,
according to your unfailing
love;
according to your great
compassion blot out my
transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
(Psalm 51:1-2)**

**My God, my God, why have
you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from
saving me,
so far from the words of my
groaning?
O my God, I cry out by day,
but you do not answer, by
night, and am not silent.
(Psalm 22:1-2)**

this cup from me" (Mark 14:36).

Although we do not hear it as much today, when I was growing up fathers regularly told their sons, "Grown men don't cry." The laments say otherwise. Men and women *do* cry, because of the harshness, the hurt, the meanness in our world. Another notion, voiced as frequently today as ever, is that Christians—real, spiritual Christians—are happy, successful people who live beyond disappointment, failure, and heartache. A group of such Christians—a church—might thus be depicted as "shiny happy people holding hands" (in the words of an R.E.M. song). Again, the laments say otherwise. God's saints are not immune from suffering, and when they hurt, they cry for help to God. And that is

another striking feature of the laments.

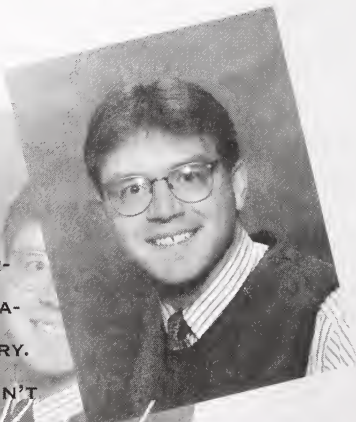
"My God, my God"—the complaints are addressed to God, and God alone; his people's hurts are laid on his doorstep. The laments say, in so many words, "Lord, you have to intervene. You must act on our behalf. It is your responsibility to make good on your promises, to uphold your part of our covenant relationship. There is no one else to whom we can turn. You alone can save us. You alone must save us."

Again, how audacious those words sound, and how unfamiliar. Our tendency, I'm persuaded, is to pray politely to God for help but to *beseech* someone else—doctor, lawyer, counselor, family member, friend. Without denying the aid and comfort that fellow humans can give, the



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laments point us to the One who alone can truly make things right again. The laments ask rhetorically, in the words of the old hymn, "Where could I go but to the Lord?" To go to him in our distress and grief is to do no more than God has urged us to do: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" (Isaiah 55:1). "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The laments point us to the One who can save, the One who *will* save.

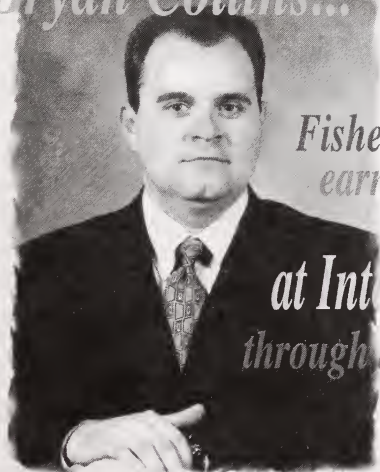
And that is where the laments end—in the confidence that God *will* hear our cries and respond to our pleas. Such confidence

is not wishful thinking or a whistling in the dark. It is, rather, the strong conviction that God will intervene to deliver, protect, heal, and comfort us.

That conviction rests on two great realities. One reality is God's historical responsiveness to his people and their needs; God's track record, if you will. "In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them" (Psalm 22:4). "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer... For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe" (Psalm 61:1, 3). The second reality is God's nature, or character. He is a God who truly hates evil and will not tolerate injustice, a God who truly feels the pains of his people and desires their well-being:

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**Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his
benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your dis-
eases,
who redeems your life from
the pit and crowns you
with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires
with good things
so that your youth is
renewed like the eagle's.
The LORD works righteous-
ness and justice for all the
oppressed.
(Psalm 103:2-6)**

These twin realities—God's nature and
God's performance—lead ultimately to an
absolute, abiding trust in God. Those of us

who thus know God still hurt; we still cry
out to him in our hurt. But we know, even
as we cry, that our prayers are being heard
and answered.

**Even though I walk
through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me...
Surely goodness and love
will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house
of the LORD forever.
(Psalm 23:4, 6)**

*Paul Watson serves the Cole Mill Rd. church as
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.....Give Thanks to the Lord

a small tug at my sleeve followed by a small voice, "Daddy, we didn't say thanks for the food." A moment of embarrassment and a swallow later we all bowed our heads. Now normally it is one of us that caution the kids, "No food before we say thanks."

But would that not be a great principal for other areas of our life, no work before thanks, no clothes before thanks, no house before thanks, no car before thanks, no vacation before thanks. All too often our daily conversations with each other are filled

with griping and complaining while we should be the more aware of our blessings. The same is true in our daily conversations with God. On a recurring basis we realized that our requests and demands on God far outweigh and outnumber the moments of thanksgiving. A challenge! Listen carefully for the next month to your own private prayers and also to public prayers and notice the requests/thanks ratio.

Personal observation: I believe that our greatest weakness in this area comes from limited vocabulary. Now this is much deeper than a theological discussion of "vain repetitions" although part of the problem starts there. For way too many years our "prayer training" has been limited

Kirk Sams

"The greatest
book of prayers
is found in the
marvelous book
of Psalms."

to what we have overheard others pray in public and to

hopefully what we heard in private at home. The resulting mimicked prayer is really not my thought, but someone else's. However, we must learn somewhere. The greatest source of prayers is contained in the marvelous book of Psalms. Why not allow ourselves to focus on an expanded vocabulary from one of the great men of God. Allowing our hearts like Paul to say, "O you who hear our prayer, to you all men will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed

are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with good things of your house, of your holy temple" (Psalm 65:2-4)

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1) These are the beginning words of a great psalm of thanksgiving. Four times in this text David says, "Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress" (107:6,13,19,28). In response to this the challenge is for the people to "Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men" (107:8,15,21,31). In between the cry and the thanks are the promises, "he satisfies the

thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (107:9), "he brought them out of darkness and deepest gloom and broke away their chains" (107:14), "he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron" (107:16), "he sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave (107:20) and "he stilled the storm with a whisper; the waves of the sea are hushed" (107:29).

Many other specifics are addressed but David seems to be referring to the wilderness wanderings and the results of their effective prayer life. May this psalm and a song be a gentle tug on our sleeve when we get too caught up in the day to day activities that we forget the awesome privilege and

responsibility of thanksgiving.

"For all that You've done I will thank You. For all that You're going to do. For all that You've promised and all that You are is all that has carried me through, Jesus, I thank you. And I thank You, thank You, LORD. And I thank You, thank You LORD! Thank You for loving and setting me free, thank You for giving your life just for me. How I thank You. Jesus, I thank You, gratefully thank You. Thank You!"

(Words by Dennis L. Jernigan, 1990
Thank You Lord, ©Copyright 1990 by
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Kirk Sams serves the Kannapolis Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2315 Concord Lake Rd., Kannapolis, NC 28081.

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On the Homefront

Four Things You Owe Your Child

With this issue of **Carolina Christian** we begin a new monthly column devoted to issues and concerns relating to marriage and family, featuring articles from a variety of authors and sources. If you would like to submit an article for this column you may send it to: **Carolina Christian**, P.O. Box 1369, Yadkinville, NC 27055. We pray that you will be blessed and help by this feature in the months ahead.

Paul Jarrett

When my children were at home my first question to

No two parents are exactly alike. No two couples are exactly alike. From parent to parent and couple to couple, individuals and couples each have their own personality and parenting style. Regardless of these expected differences, I believe that there are four things that all parents owe their children.

First, you owe them your presence.

Successful parenting starts with your being there. The negative impact of broken homes and the resulting absence of fathers and mothers has been well documented. Sometimes even parents who are bodily present in the home are absent with respect to their level of involvement with their children. Parents sometimes try to compensate with "quality time," but even recent secular studies reveal that quantity is just as important as quality. Parents, your children need your **presence** more than they need your **presents**.

Second, you owe them your interest and your encouragement. Obviously, this begins with your presence. My fondest memories of my own father center around the interest he showed in my athletic competitions. My mother remains a constant source of encouragement to me even to this day.

them when they came home from school was, "How was your day?" They sometimes complained about having to give an account of their day. However, one day one of their friends heard them complaining and said, "I wish my father would ask me just one time how my day had gone." Are your children waiting for you to ask them about their day?

Third, they need your direction, your correction, and your discipline. What I have just identified are the three attributes of the thing that teens, when polled, say they need most from their parents: discipline. This point was driven home to me once when my teenage daughter asked me if she could go somewhere with her friends. I told her that it was her decision, but her response was, "Please, tell me I can't go." She wanted me to fulfill my parental duty to protect her.

Fourth, they need your consistency. Parents will not always be right. However, our children will forgive our mistakes so long as they know that we are always acting in love in accordance with what we feel is in their best interest (see Hebrews 12:9-10). What will exasperate them and provoke them to wrath is when they see inconsistencies in our instruction, discipline and conduct. Childhood may be compared to playing a game of handball in which the role of the parent is to provide the smooth, consistent surface off which the child bounces.

Simply put, we owe our children an authentic love.

*Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102. This article originally appeared in the publication **A Christian Review** (March, 1999), an outreach of the Naples Church of Christ.*

In Search of Renewal: Part 3

Disciplined for Discipleship

“*Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*” (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Phil Stapp

performed to manipulate God. Nor are they a set of

I agree with the statement written by Richard J. Foster, “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people” (*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 1). It is sad to observe the lack of spiritual depth in so many Christians and the lack of desire to grow and change.

To be disciples of Christ, doing the will of our Father in heaven, we must prepare ourselves. The professional athlete is able to perform in tough situations because of countless hours of preparation and practice. If Christians are going to serve God effectively and perform well in tough situations, we too must spend countless hours in preparation. The spiritual disciplines play a vital role in this capacity. These disciplines, or exercises, open our hearts to the blessings and power of God. By God’s grace and power we are then empowered to do the work he has prepared for us to do.

Before we examine the individual exercises, a word of caution is needed. Christians must remember that the spiritual disciplines are not some magic ritual

self-help exercises. These exercises open our hearts and minds to the transforming power of God. It is the power of God that prepares us to do his work, not what we accomplish or do. Also, we must not make these exercises into a legalistic standard. The spiritual disciplines must only be used to open our hearts and minds to the power and guidance of God.

There are many disciplines discussed in scripture and different treatments of the subject have come up with different lists. The purpose of this discussion is to offer a brief examination of what I consider to be the basic spiritual exercises and how they help prepare us to do the will of the Father. I will move from those disciplines that are inward in nature to those that are more outward. For a more in depth discussion of the spiritual disciplines I suggest the following books: Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* and Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

Solitude is the deliberate choice to be alone, abstaining from interaction with other human beings. The purpose of solitude is to give us distance from others and the activities of life so that we can reflect on our relationships and experiences. Jesus often went off by himself to solitary places to pray and reflect on his ministry and what lay ahead (see Mark 1:35 and 6:32).

In silence we close off our souls from sounds, whether they be music, words, television, or the noise of life. Silence works

together with solitude to allow us to be alone with and hear God. Jesus instructed his disciples to pray in an inner room, alone and in silence (Matthew 6:5-8).

After teaching from village to village, Jesus took the apostles to a quiet place to rest (Mark 6:30-31). Jesus understood the need for solitude and silence, for only silence will allow us life-transforming concentration upon God.

The discipline of prayer puts us in direct communication with God. Prayer works closely with solitude, silence, study, fasting, meditation and worship to express our faith in God's grace and come to an

understanding of God's will for our lives and for the Kingdom in general (Matthew 6:5-15). Prayer must be genuine, from the heart, seeking God's will and power in our lives.

Our prayers need to explore, examine, search and listen. To pray is to change.

Fasting is the abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer and meditation (see Leviticus 23:26-32; Matthew 6:5-18) and is done in various ways for various

lengths. While fasting can take many forms (even fasting from sex, 1 Corinthians 7:5) it is always for the purpose of focusing on God and confirming our dependency on him for our strength.

Study is the examination of and reflection on the written word of God.

Study helps one better understand the will of God and replace our old life-style with the new life in Christ (Hebrews 5:11-14). Effective study will utilize the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer and meditation.

In fellowship we engage in the activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service with

other disciples. The early Christians spent as much time together as possible to encourage one another and share in these various activities (see Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). In true Christian fellowship we learn to love one another, build each other up, rebuke, correct, teach and prepare one another for Christian service.

Submission is the highest form of fellowship. It engages us with others in our fellowship as we seek their help and guidance in our growth as a Christian. As

Service seeks to care for the needs of others and can be done individually or in fellowship. The result is the building up of the body and the glorification of God.

Christians we are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Submission helps each of us grow and mature and be more submissive to Christ and God. We are also to submit to those Christians whose experience and maturity make them qualified to direct and lead us in growth and help us to do the will of our Father in heaven (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17).

The discipline of service builds community and seeks to glorify God. We can think of the towel as the sign of service as Jesus washed his disciples' feet and told them to do the same to one another (John 13:1-17). We serve when we utilize our resources and abilities to do good to others

(Christians and non-Christians, Galatians 6:9-10). Service seeks to care for the needs of others and can be done individually or in fellowship. The result is the building up of the body and the glorification of God.

Confession functions within fellowship and involves sharing our weaknesses and failures with trusted others. It does not mean that we must tell everyone everything. When we "confess our sins to each other and pray for each other" (James 5:16) we received strength from each other and from God.

Celebration flows out of our worship to God and our service to others. It is an important, if not often forgotten, discipline. Celebration is at the heart of Christian living as we enjoy life, our world and each other in conjunction with our faith in God. Celebration allows us to see our life and this world as God's work and God's gift to us. It brings joy into our lives and joy makes us strong.

As stated before, there are other exercises or disciplines, but I consider these to be the foundation and source of all others. Done in the proper attitude these exercises will bring our character and total being into effective cooperation with God. Through them God will prepare us, empower us, guide us and give us a willing heart to do his will. When this happens, with the power of God within us and the joy of Christ in our hearts, we will go into the world and do the work that God has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10) and carry on the ministry of Jesus.

Phil Stapp serves the Brewer Rd. church in Winston-Salem, NC. He can be contacted at 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27127.

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.....Don't Be Afraid to Ask

In a Family Circus comic strip, Dolly stood holding a doll upside down over the toilet. As she prepared to dunk the doll in the water she proclaimed, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son, and into the hole you goes." Many things about God, the Bible and the church are hard to understand. Sometimes, like Dolly, we don't know that we don't understand. However, when we do know that we don't understand something, what should we do? Ask questions!

The second time that Jesus plainly told His disciples that He would die and rise again, "they did not understand what He meant and were afraid to ask Him about it" (Mark 9:32). With the whole New Testament available to us, it's easy to see what Jesus was saying. But Luke says the meaning was hidden from the disciples (Luke 9:45). Three of them had recently witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus and all of them had just seen Him cast a demon out of a boy. Jesus was the awesome Messiah in whom they were putting all their hope! Why would their powerful but innocent leader be put to death? They were afraid to ask.

Perhaps they were afraid of annoying Jesus with another question. That day they had already asked Him questions about Elijah's coming and about why they themselves were unable to cast the demon out of the holy (Mark 9:11, 28).

Jesus loved to help people understand the truth. He took great care to explain parables to His disciples and when Jews struggled to understand the relationship of Jesus with the Father, He told them more. As a result, many put their faith in Him while He was talking (John 8:27-30). Jesus prized the opportunity to answer an honest question.

Danny Boggs

The disciples might also have been afraid to ask Jesus

what he meant because they heard Him correctly. He said He was going to be killed and they were filled with grief (Matthew 17:22-23). They hoped He was wrong!

It's also possible that they kept quiet because they remembered what happened the last time Jesus talked about His death and resurrection. Peter had opened his mouth too fast. No way was he going to let anyone kill Jesus! Jesus then looked at Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33). But Peter wasn't asking a question. He was unwittingly trying to thwart God's plan.

And then, maybe the disciples were afraid to ask because they were just like us. Maybe they thought that the more questions they asked, the more confused they would be. Or maybe each one was afraid of looking stupid in front of the others. Remember, though, that the old saying is true: the only stupid question is the one that is never asked.

If the disciples hadn't been afraid to ask what Jesus was talking about, maybe Peter wouldn't have felt the need to swing a sword at Malchus when Jesus was being arrested. Maybe the disciples wouldn't have been so unwilling to believe that Jesus was alive on the day He arose.

The devil would love for us to listen to Jesus and our teachers without ever asking a question. When we don't understand the Word of God, the devil snatches it away from our hearts (Matthew 13:19). Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville church. He can be reached at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791, or by e-mail at: dannyboggs@juno.com.

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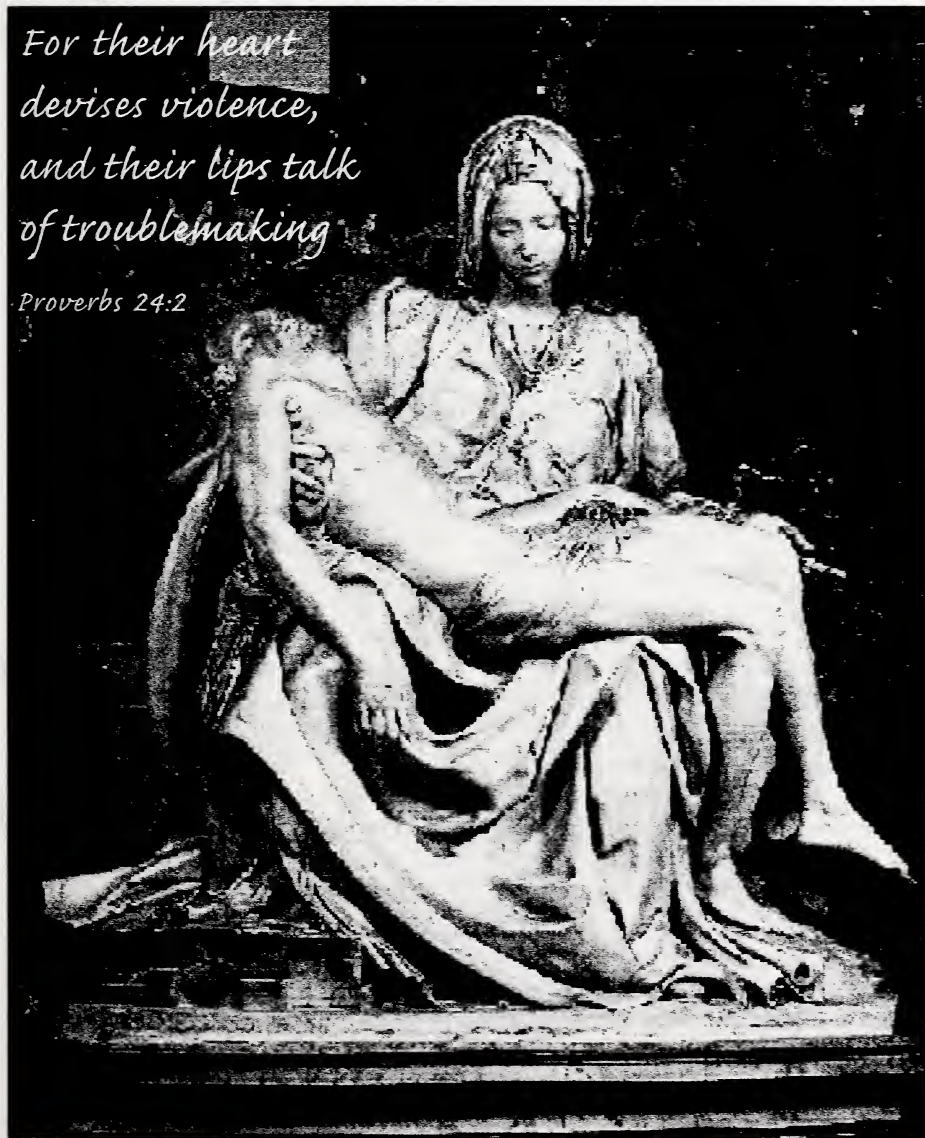
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*For their heart
devises violence,
and their lips talk
of troublemaking*

Proverbs 24:2



CAROLINA christian

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Proactive Churches.....

Over the course of the past two or three years the American psyche has taken quite a hit at the hands of the perpetrators of unspeakable acts of violence. And who are those committing the violence? Crazy drug addicts? Hardened criminals? Mafia? No. Our children.

Oregon. Mississippi. Arkansas. Colorado. Georgia. We have been quite accustomed to the stories coming out of the big cities about gangs, drive-by shootings, drugs: violence in all its myriad forms. But those violent acts that have been shaking our nation to its collective core in recent years have been carried out for the most part in small town America: Pearl, Springfield, Jonesboro, Conyers and Littleton—the very places that are supposed to represent our moral heart. The cancerous tentacles of violence have spread into those places we once thought it the least likely to appear. Over and over again we hear people uttering the same phrase of disbelief, “I never thought something like this could happen here.” But now it has. And it does. And it will.

While other shocking, outrageous violent crimes have grabbed their share of media headlines, nothing has shaken us like the school shootings (with the exception of the Oklahoma City bombing). And why is that? Perhaps because the violence is being carried out by kids. Who could have imagined it a generation ago? Children in our schools taking up guns and killing other children...without flinching!

All across our country people of all

Dennis Conner

political and religious persuasions are asking the

same question: Why? There is no one, single answer. The deterioration of the nuclear family? Without question. The attack on and abandonment of religious values? To be sure. We are now beginning to reap the chaotic fruit of moral relativism. The violence in movies, video games and on TV that constantly bombards and desensitizes the moral consciousness of our children? Undeniably. Those who have suggested this in the past are no longer being viewed as radicals and crackpots. *CNN Headline News* recently ran a segment suggesting the possibility that television and movie violence serve to create an atmosphere for the kinds of shocking, senseless deeds we are now witnessing. Scientific and academic studies also lend their support to the thesis that entertainment violence is bad for our kids. And on and on we could go with the reasons.

I have another question in mind, however. My question is: What's the church doing? Are we being reactive or proactive? Many of us are content to simply decry and bemoan the deplorable-ness of the situation, gauging our righteous indignation by the loudness of our complaints. However, it's not sufficient for us to lend our voices to the myriads of others decrying the situation of youth violence if we're not attempting to be part of the solution. And what can the church do?

For one thing, offer parenting classes; not only for church members, but for those

in the community. For another, use family life centers (those churches that have them) to offer youth in the community a place to go. Offer them a safe haven from the warped values and attitudes of the world.

More importantly, challenge our own youth and adults to move beyond their comfort zones and begin seeing people the way Jesus would. *Time* magazine's coverage of the Columbine High massacre noted that "in" groups at the high school regularly taunted and made fun of those who were different and occupied the outer fringes. That may be typical of adolescent behavior, but it should not be typical of Christians. However, there are many Christian kids who also make fun of others even as they wear their WWJD T-shirts, caps, bracelets and necklaces. The kids on the fringes are obviously on the outside looking for

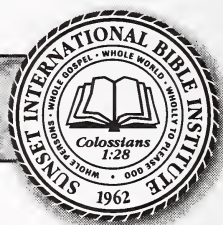
acceptance. And what would Jesus do? Reach out to them and offer them a place to belong.

And as for adults, what's our initial response when we see a kid with rings adorning not only ears, but also tongues, lips, eyebrows and belly buttons? What do we see? A "weird kid" or a kid who needs Jesus? What do we feel? Revulsion or compassion? We've got to begin seeing people the way Jesus would see them.

There is virtually no end to the opportunities to make a difference in the lives of troubled kids and families. The challenge before us is to be proactive by creatively and compassionately reaching out to the youth of today. The most powerful alternative to the simmering anger in so many of our kids and the consequent violence is the Prince of Peace.

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Who Is To Blame?

tragic. Such a waste. Dreadful. Catastrophic! These are but a few of the words used recently to describe the unthinkable events that transpired in Littleton, Colorado a few weeks ago. As horrible as the murder of twelve students and a teacher was, it has now been learned from the police that a diary kept by one of the killers detailed the plans to kill at least 500 people in the school, burn it to the ground, kill at random as many as possible in the neighborhood, hijack a plane and crash it over New York City.

Once the shock wears off in tragedies such as this, there is always a search for a cause and a way to prevent it from ever happening again. Usually there's a clamor about passing more laws. But is that really the solution? Then there's the usual self-flagellation of society. "We should have done more. We should have seen the warning signals. We should have..." While reflection by a society can be helpful in the aftermath of this kind of calamity, *shoulda, woulda, coulda* thinking is seldom very useful.

How do we explain such depravity and violence? There's enough blame to go around. But again, I'm not convinced that blaming anyone other than the murderers who are ultimately responsible for this carnage is all that productive. Having said that, however, I believe that the entertainment industry does have to make some sober decisions about what they produce. It seems ludicrous to me that companies

Ron Newberry

will spend millions of dollars in advertising,

which lasts at most a minute in the belief that they can alter buying habits (behavior) of people, and then claim that movies, video games, etc., have no effect on behavior. It's absurd to maintain that music has no effect on people — especially young, impressionable minds — when music has been used for centuries to plant messages, rally people around causes, and touch us where we are most likely to be moved: the heart.

Are the parents to blame in situations such as this? They are easy targets. They may well be liable for the actions of their sons, but that's too simplistic. Surely the parents of the two murderers should have had a better of what was happening in the lives of their children. However, the two murderers themselves were ultimately responsible and accountable for their actions.

I certainly don't have the answer, other than to realize that there is an evil presence in this world that is daily evident. I believe that we have to start holding individuals responsible for their behavior at an early age and stop blaming someone else. I believe that true freedom takes a willingness to discipline and restrain self. Will and Ariel Durant, in their extensive work on the history of the world, said this: "The first condition of freedom is its limitation; make freedom absolute and it dies in chaos."

The Horror of Littleton.....

Who can forget
April 20? The

Peter Rode

Are Failed Adults," *L.A. Times*, April 28, 1999). Best-

sight of school children
running for cover. SWAT teams entering the
school building under cover of vehicles. The

terrible news about
explosions and shots
being fired. Children
being rushed to the
hospital. Finally, the full
story of the awful saga
that took place at the
Columbine High School
in Littleton, Colorado.
The final death toll —
fourteen students and
one teacher. Since that
dark and horrible day

there has been a constant barrage of news
coming out of Littleton. Many questions are
being asked. Many accusations are being
made. Many articles are being written. A lot
of "advice" is being dispensed by "experts."
Fifteen funerals have been conducted. And
so it goes...

Why did Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold
go on that ruthless rampage? We'll never
know for sure what happened that day, but
people are still raising questions. Dana Mack
of the *L.A. Times* comes to the conclusion
that the parents of the community are to
blame because "today's adults want kids to
manage on their own. They're happy
enough to organize them, but they refuse to
nurture them." Mack reports that in the
suicide note left by one of the killers, he
complained, "...there was too much
negative peer interaction in his life, and too
little protection from adults" ("These Kids

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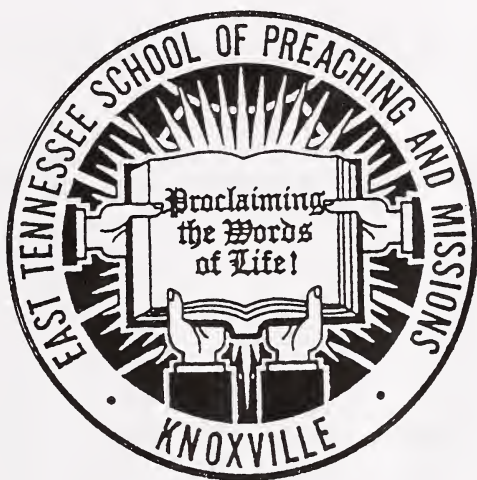
*"Today's adults ...
They're happy
enough to organize
them, but they
refuse to nurture
them."*

selling author Tom Clancy says that, along
with the curriculum of the Catholic school
he attended, "...came a few simple rules:

killing and stealing
were out. Why?
Because they were
wrong." Clancy
continued, "Perhaps
too many public school
teachers do not view
moral instruction as
being within their
professional purview.
Perhaps their union
disapproves of prayers
and morality-teaching

as much as the ACLU does... Our ideas of
right and wrong ultimately come from a
source higher than government. And to say
such a thing would offend atheists. But if
you remove something and fail to replace it
with something else, there will always be a
downstream effect" ("Moral Absolutes,
No More Gun Laws," *L.A. Times*,
April 17, 1999).

Tad Bartimus of MSNBC lays the
blame on the culture of our society. She
says, "Since Salk, America has developed
this sense of entitlement toward the quick
fix... Now, no matter what our malady, we
expect the same cure... Those warning
signs (nearly 2,000 www. addresses
classified as 'hate' sites, and nearly 6,000
incidents involving weapons in American
schools last year) would raise more
questions, questions raise issues, and issues
require choices. Grownups hate making



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choices" (Tad Bartimus, "No Miracle Cure," www.msnbc.com/news/265297.asp, May 3, 1999).

My perspective is this: God has been forced out of the lives of most of the population because of, I believe, a deliberate (satanic) misinterpretation of the First Amendment—a freedom from religion. When you don't have God in your life, you have no absolutes, no accountability to a higher authority, and finally, no discipline in your life. Add to this godless equation a generation that is self-absorbed and unwilling to take responsibility for their actions, and you have the seeds that lead to Columbine. The "boomer" generation has sown the wind and is now reaping the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). The only answer for all the

trouble in this land, and any land, is the following:

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land"

(2 Chronicles 7:14).

This world lies in darkness and we must never forget it. The church has the light and we need to bear the responsibility of taking the light of God to the rest of the world. May this tragedy at Columbine be a wake-up call for us all.

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave church and can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 272410

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.....An Amoral Society

Violence has been a part of our

heritage as a nation from the very beginning. War gave birth to our nation. Our borders were expanded by waging war against our neighbors and genocide against the native population. Our bloodiest conflict pitted brother against brother. Our national folklore is peopled by both heroes and villains who were violent men (Wyatt Earp and Al Capone, for example). We lead the world in homicides and executions. Abuse is commonplace in our homes. This fascination with violence carries over into our sports and entertainment.

In recent years this violence has taken an even darker turn. In the past even the perpetrators of violence seemed to possess some moral consciousness regarding their actions. Today, however, those who are committing violent acts seem to lack any sense of right and wrong in regard to their actions. This is seen especially in the violence being committed by our youth in schools and neighborhoods. These crimes are not being committed by the immoral, but by the amoral.

What has led us to this point? There is probably no single answer to this question. There is no doubt that the problems can often be traced to conditions which exist in our homes. However, the conditions which exist in our homes are the product of a more basic flaw which exists in our society. What we are seeing is the fruit of what happens when

Paul Jarrett

a nation rejects its moral foundation.

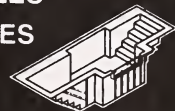
When our nation embraced the freedom to believe anything, the door was opened to those who choose to believe nothing. When children were told to develop their own values, the door was opened to those who would elect to hold no values. When people were told they were not accountable to a higher power than themselves, the way was opened to their behaving in a totally unaccountable way. When the sanctity of all life was set aside in favor of promoting the quality of life, the door was opened to those whose only agenda is their own personal pleasure.

Moral codes have always been needed to protect society from the immorality which exists in even the best of nations. When those moral foundations are undermined, the door is open to a more frightening form of violence committed by an amoral generation.

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The Heritage of Violence

It has been said that prostitution is the oldest profession. Perhaps so, but it is certainly not the oldest sin. At least two other sins pre-date it: that of obedience to the wrong voice (disobedience to the right voice—God’s) and violence. Genesis 3:1-6 tells the story of how Eve was deceived by Satan and was then followed by Adam (see also 1 Timothy 2:14). Consequently, sin entered into the world. As the story continues, the first two sons of Adam and Eve—Abel and Cain—brought their respective sacrifices to the Lord. Cain became very angry because God had respect for Abel’s sacrifice, but not his (Genesis 4:4-5). His face became downcast, no doubt from being peeved and jealous. Cain then killed his brother because, as Scripture says, “his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12). So, evil works led to displeasure from God, to which Cain responded with anger, jealousy and a fallen countenance. These in turn led to the first recorded act of violence. Cain talked with Abel in the field and, instead of the conversation going well and Cain repenting, he “rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him” (Genesis 4:8).

Violence was also a cause for the flood. “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, ‘The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy

Burl Curtis

them with the earth’ ” (Genesis 6:11-13). Should

this not be a warning to us? Although violence is not specifically mentioned, Jesus said, “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37). According to the latest news, violence is filling the earth today. Both local and national news carry stories about violence and often they are the lead stories. But are we to think that all the murders, rapes, stabbings, shootings, kidnappings, bombings, etc., are reported? You could watch news stations and read newspapers constantly and still not know all the acts of violence that are perpetrated. And if we knew all of them, could we bear it? Perhaps this is what Solomon had in mind when he said, “For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

God’s attitude toward violence is clearly shown in the Old Testament. The Lord’s soul hates anyone who loves violence (Psalm 11:5). The penalty for violent theft was the restoration of all that was taken, plus 20% (Leviticus 6:2, 5). David prayed for the Lord to destroy those who caused violence and strife in the city (Psalm 55:9). Also in Psalms we may read that pride encircles the wicked as a chain: “Violence covereth them as a garment” (Psalm 73:6). Proverbs speaks of the wicked drinking the wine of violence and transgressors eating it (Proverbs 4:17; 13:2). Further, the Lord sent Jeremiah to the king of Judah. His message to the king was, “Execute ye

judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place” (Jeremiah 22:2-3). Even a king, if he committed violence, deserved only the burial of a donkey, “drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 22:17-19).

By contrast, Jesus did “no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9). Also, it would be difficult to find any section of the New Testament where violence is not condemned (Matthew 5:9, 39; Romans 12:17-21; James 4:1-3). Isaiah said it beautifully: “When righteousness is in the land, violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise” (Isaiah 60:18).

So what can we do to make the world a safer place and save souls at the same time? Please consider the following:

1. *Have the fear of God (reverence) in your heart and try to lead others to do the same, especially your children.* You cannot get out of the sight of the Lord (Proverbs 15:3), so every act of violence is done in his sight.

2. *Remember that all mankind is made in the image of God and all people, regardless of how much they differ from you, must be honored.* Peter wrote, “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17).

3. *Learn to control your jealousy and anger.* Self-control (temperance) is commanded for the Christian (2 Peter 1:6). Parents and guardians need to start very early helping children to develop self-control as well.

4. *Don't permit your mind to dwell on insults and hurts.* Paul said, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

5. *Don't push anyone into a corner and don't let yourself be pushed into a corner.* A small dog will fight a large one if pushed into a corner with no known way to escape. So, don't let greed or drugs become your “corner.”

6. *Be careful who your friends are.* If you run with the violent, you are likely to become like them. “Be not deceived: evil communications (bad company) corrupt good manners (morals)” (1 Corinthians 15:33). “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go” (Proverbs 22:24).

7. *Flee any group, or gang, which requires you to commit violence in order to be accepted.* Acceptance by other humans is fleeting and temporary. Seek instead the divine acceptance and approval of the eternal Father.

Burl Curtis is a former editor of Carolina Christian. He can be contacted at 118 Red Oak Lane Searcy, AR 72143.

A Famous Athlete, a Teenage Boy and Family

In recent days the news media has deluged us with information, analysis, speculations and recommendations in the wake of shooting incidents on school campuses. The subject has surely been explored from every possible angle. One wonders if we have not been over informed.

Sandwiched in between the Littleton tragedy and the Conyers misfortune was a heartwarming story that probably didn't make the news away from North Louisiana, where I live. It's a story about a teenage boy, a famous athlete and his family and it deserves wider exposure.

Let's start with the athlete. The year was 1959. Harvey Haddix pitched the longest no-hitter in the history of baseball. He lost the game in the twelfth inning when Joe Adcock of the Milwaukee Braves hit a home run. Joe Adcock was from our neck of the woods, a place called Coushatta. Although some of his teammates — Eddie Matthews, Hank Aaron, Lew Burdette and Warren Spahn — were better known, Adcock left his mark on the game. He hit 336 home runs in 17 seasons and played on the team that won the World Series in 1957. After his career was finished, Adcock went home to Coushatta, where he lived until his death earlier this month.

Now let's talk about the teenage boy. His name is Jamie Adams. Jamie is an 18 year old senior at Lakeview High School in Coushatta. He maintains a 4.0 grade point average and he plays tennis. As a matter of

Norman Bales

fact, he plays tennis very well. He won three state champi-

onships and may have been on his way to a fourth one, when he learned of Joe Adcock's death. Oh, I forgot to tell you. Joe Adcock was Jamie's grandfather. Jamie was in the midst of the championship game, when the matches were halted for a rain delay. The rain delay meant he wouldn't be able to attend his grandfather's funeral. He chose to withdraw from the match.

Why did Jamie do it? That's where family comes in. From Jamie's point of view, family was his grandfather's priority. He said, "Family always came first to Papaw. I wanted to come home and be there for my sister and my cousins and I wanted to say good by."

From what I can see, it sounds like Jamie Adams is a young man who has his head on straight. I'm sure there are thousands of young people in our world who value family just as much as Jamie does. They're not going to walk into school buildings and start shooting. They're going to make good grades, respect adults and behave responsibly. At an early age they developed enough character to make the right decisions in life. I don't know of any law or even any principle that would have required Jamie to relinquish his quest for a state tennis title, but I have great respect for his choice.

His decision to give priority to his family wasn't really made on the Highland Park tennis courts in Baton Rouge, where the championship matches were being

played. His decision was made gradually as a result of his respect for and relationship to a man he called "Papaw." Joe Adcock was a man, who lived in the spotlight for awhile, but what he gave his family may have been his most important achievement. Wouldn't it have been nice to have heard that story on CNN or even ESPN?

In the Bible the names of Eunice and Lois have survived for many centuries. We don't know much about them. Perhaps they possessed remarkable culinary skills. They may have been proficient in the use of the loom. Who knows what remarkable things they may have done?

We remember them for one thing. They passed along faith to their son and grandson (2 Timothy 1:5). I just wish the members of the media had enough wisdom to recognize the value of that accomplishment.

This article first appeared in the **All About Families** electronic newsletter, May 23, 1999. It is used here with permission of the author. You may subscribe to the newsletter by e-mail by writing to: aaf@allaboutfamilies.org. Type "Subscribe" in the subject line.

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No Room to be Rude

W

hat causes us to be rude?

Danny Boggs

Sometime's it's a lack of self-control. At other times it's taking out our frustrations on someone who really has nothing to do with our mood. Often, it's simply our way of getting attention in a crowd where we might go unnoticed.

When do Christians have the right to be rude? Never!

In Titus 3:1-2 Paul reminds us "to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men." How many of these characteristics are the opposites of rudeness? Every one of them! One in particular — "true humility" — is 180 degrees from rude. In another translation it is "perfect courtesy."

Being rebellious, selfish, bad-mouthed and inconsiderate are perfect ways to show that Christ has no influence at all in our lives. "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

People who have really experienced the love of God and been born again don't

Carolina Christian

"The religious paraphernalia they wore could not camouflage their lack of devotion to God."

act that way anymore. "But when the kindness and love

of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He

saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone" (Titus 3:4-8).

Most of the time when Christian teens are being rude, they don't even realize it. Very few of us are rude when we're alone or in small groups, and most of us have an outlook on life that keeps us from taking out frustrations on everyone around us. We let down our guard when we get into big groups, start having fun, and ignore the needs of others around us.

I've been in fast food restaurants when Christian kids have broken out

into belching contests, taken all the napkins and straws in the restaurant in order to do tricks, and generally have been so loud and obnoxious as to make it impossible for fellow customers to enjoy a nice meal with their families. Each kid was probably just trying to outdo the other, to stand out, to get some attention. But there is no excuse!

What's even worse, customers have seen us all get out of the "church of Christ" van, wearing our "Christian" shirts!

I can hear Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees echoing back to us: "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels of their garments long," (Matthew 23:5). Phylacteries were little leather boxes strapped around the forehead and the wrists, containing small portions of Scripture. Tassels hung from the clothing and were meant to remind the wearer of God's commandments. Both of these could have been great reminders to focus on God. Instead, the Pharisees used them to draw attention to themselves. The religious paraphernalia they wore could not camouflage their lack of devotion to God.

Christians never have room to be rude, but especially when we outfit ourselves with shirts, caps, or bracelets that proclaim our faith in Christ. In those threads we can't hide our influence, and being rude will definitely turn people away from Christ.

Why not stand out by modeling for

your friends loving obedience, interest in others, good manners and true humility? No matter where you are, no matter who you are with, and no matter what you are wearing, set the tone and emphasize that anything that might hurt our influence for Christ will not be tolerated. As Paul told Titus, "I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good."

Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791. His e-mail address is: dannyboggs@juno.com.

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In Search of Renewal: Part 4

The Community of Christ

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it’ ” (Matthew 16:16-18).

The church that Christ built is described in many different ways in the New Testament. It is the Body of Christ, the family of God, the Bride of Christ and many others. These are powerful pictures. To best understand these pictures it is important to understand “church.” What did Jesus and the New Testament writers mean when they used this word?

When people today think of the word “church” they envision a number of different ideas and concepts. Some are shaped by their experiences of “going to church.” Others are products of what they have been taught, or what they have seen and heard. Unfortunately many are not based on the teachings of Scripture. This has led to a confused picture of “church.”

The Greek word used in the New Testament that is translated “church” is *ekklesia*. In New Testament times it meant “assembly,” “congregation” or “community.” I believe it is the idea of “community” that is expressed by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament. As Robert Banks writes, “Its chief importance lies in the way it stresses the centrality of meeting for community life: it is through gathering

Phil Stapp

that the community comes into being and is continually

recreated” (Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting Grand Rapids*. Eerdmans, 1980, p. 51).

When Jesus told his disciples that he was going to build his “community,” he was building on an Old Testament concept with which they were familiar. The Hebrew word for community or assembly in the Old Testament is *qahal*. It is an important word in the life of Israel in the Old Testament.

In Genesis *qahal* is used when God promised to make Jacob into a “community of nations” (Genesis 35:11; see also 48:4). When the Israelites came out of Egypt they were referred to as the “Israelite community” or the “whole community of Israel” (see Leviticus 4:13,21; 16:17,33; Numbers 14:5; 16:3,33; 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:22; 31:30). This was a community made up of people in a covenant relationship with God. The community was distinguished from aliens (Numbers 15:15) and to become “unclean” before God was to be cut off from the community (Numbers 19:20).

When the Israelites broke the covenant with God they were destroyed as a community as the prophets had foretold (see Micah 2:1-5). When they repented and God returned them from exile, they once again became a community (see Ezra 10:8,10; Nehemiah 8:2; 13:1).

It appears that this idea of a community of people in covenant relationship with God is behind Jesus’ statement of establishing “his community.” Christ’s community is

a gathering of people who are in covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This community is like no other because Jesus is its savior and head (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23). It is a community that submits to him who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God above all other powers and authority (Ephesians 1:19-21).

The church is the community of the King. With Christ as its King, the community finds identity and purpose. Members of this community find identity as disciples of Christ and as citizens of the kingdom of God. To be a member of this community is to be transformed in the image of Christ and to live as a citizen of the kingdom in this sinful world, carrying out the ministry of their Lord and Savior to a lost and dying world.

Daniel had prophesied that during the days of the Roman Empire, God would establish his eternal kingdom (Daniel 2). In the birth, work, death and resurrection of Jesus the kingdom of God did come smashing into the world. The community of Christ is meant to be that entity through which the kingdom breaks into human experience. We are rescued from the "dominion of darkness" and brought "into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

This community provides worship, fellowship and mission for God's people. Through the worship, fellowship and mission of this community the kingdom of God continues to expand and grow. Through worship and fellowship, the community pursues the kingdom of heaven. It becomes an outpost of heaven's

reign in a world in rebellion against God. In mission the community models the kingdom before the world. It is a light to those living in darkness and offers hope to the lost.

In community Christians support, encourage, teach, rebuke, correct, strengthen and train one

another. Only in community can this kind of fellowship take place because it is in community that we are removed from self and involved in the lives of others. When we understand that we are part of a community we realize that we are not alone and that we have responsibility to others.

The New Testament church is the community that Christ built. It has overcome sin and death and carries out his ministry in unity to the glory of God. This is its true nature. It is Christ's community that he created, that he sustains and empowers through his Spirit.

Phil Stapp serves the Brewer Rd. church in Winston-Salem, NC. He can be contacted at 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27127.

*"It becomes
an outpost
of heaven's reign
in a world in
rebellion
against God."*

MAYHILL, NEW MEXICO...

A busload of teens from the Greenlawn Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas was involved in a fatal accident on Sunday afternoon, May 2. Authorities reported that a fifth-wheel camper broke loose from an oncoming pickup truck and struck the bus and one car. Six teens in the bus were killed, and one man in the car was also killed. No less than twenty were injured (several of them in critical condition) and treated in hospital in Alamogordo and Albuquerque. The teens were returning to Lubbock from a weekend retreat at Pine Springs Camp. The efforts of an injured teen leader has been described as "heroic" as he administered first aid to passengers of the bus. Churches of Christ across New Mexico and Texas have responded quickly with assistance.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA...

Tornadoes wrecked havoc in Oklahoma in early May. The widespread devastation provided a great opportunity for churches to serve. National Public Radio

and other media sources cited Churches of Christ in Oklahoma City as being on the frontline of relief efforts. The Oakcrest congregation used their facility as a clearing house for clothing, baby items, food and blankets. Their 1,500 seat auditorium was filled with donations even before tornado victims were allowed back into their homes. The Oakcrest church of Christ soon requested cash donations rather than supplies. The wide-spread destruction made it difficult to use the food and clothing donations given within the first few days. Funds may be sent to: Oakcrest church of Christ, 1111 S.W. 89th, Okla. City, OK 73139, (405) 631-5534.

ABORTION POLL...

A recent USA TODAY/CNN/ GALLUP poll indicates the number of Americans who identify themselves as pro-choice is no longer in the majority. The poll found that the level of pro-choice support has dropped to 48%, down from a high of 56% three years ago. The number of people identifying themselves as pro-life is on the rise, now up to 42 compared to 36% in 1996. Analysts quoted by USA Today attribute much of the pro-life gain to the debate over partial birth abortions. This gruesome procedure where a doctor kills a baby that is in the birth canal is

apparently having an impact on many who, up until now, may have been undecided about the abortion issue. More than 60% of those polled say they favor making the procedure illegal.

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SC...

The church of Christ on Hilton Head Island will host Dr. Paul Faulkner's newest seminar "BUILDING A LASTING LEGACY" July 16-18, 1999. The seminar is free, but pre-registration is required. For information for reservations call (843) 686-2323. The church on Hilton Head Island will celebrate their 10th anniversary in conjunction with the seminar. An "Old Fashioned Songfest" will be part of their celebration on Sunday, July 18, 2:00- 3:30 pm.

MARIETTA, SC...

Palmetto Bible Camp will conclude six weeks of regular camp on July 24. "Mini-Camp" will be offered July 30 through August 1 for ages 6-9. "Mini-Camp" provides an opportunity for students too young for the regular camping season to attend a special session with a parent or guardian. Mark Kelly will direct this special weekend. He can be reached at (828) 693-6485. Request copies of applications by writing to Palmetto Bible Camp, 901 Lake Avenue, North Augusta, SC 29841.

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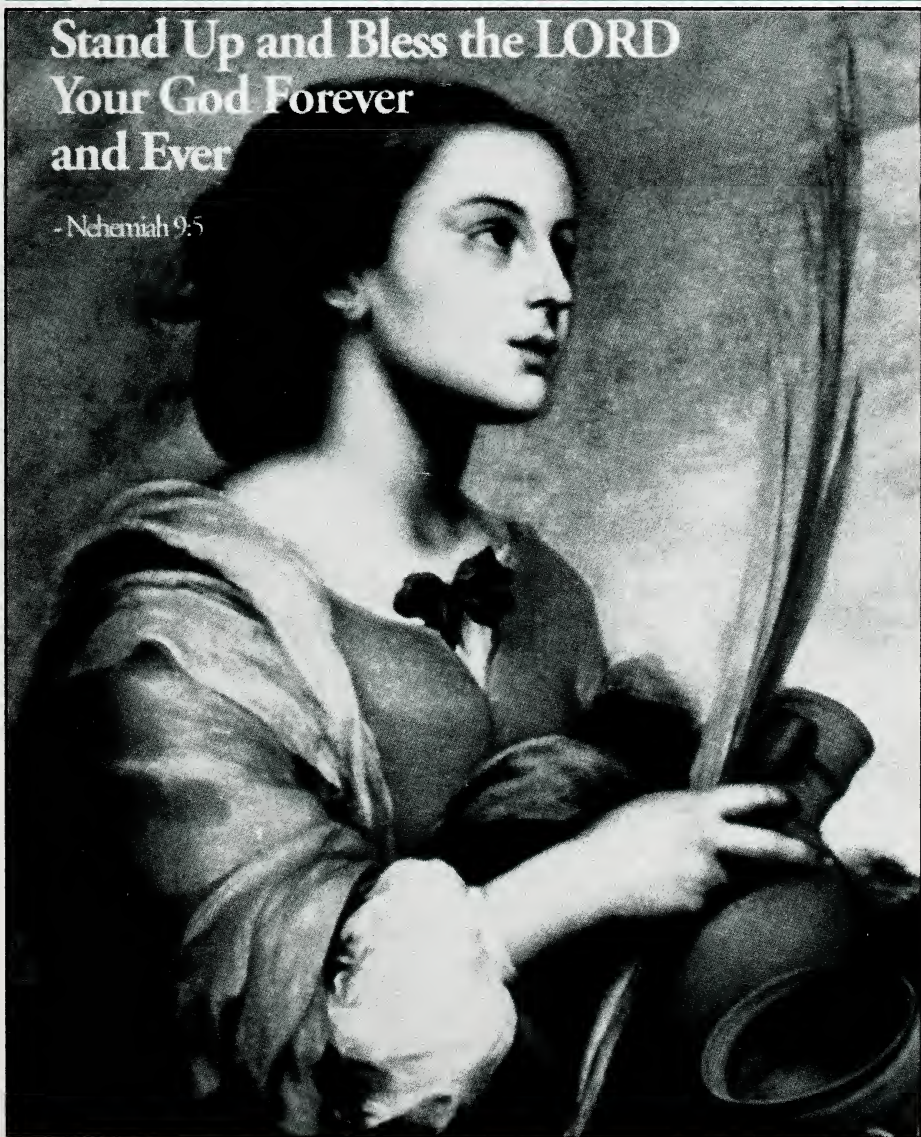
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- Nehemiah 9:5



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Prayer and Preaching.....

a few questions
for my preach-

Dennis Conner

are five areas in which the
necessity of prayer for

ing brethren (and as for you listening brethren, these may well be pertinent questions for you to be asking of your preacher): What steps do you take in the preparation of a typical sermon? Does

**E. M. Bounds
has noted
that, "he who
plows not in
his closet will
not reap in
his pulpit."**

prayer play an
integral role in
your sermon
preparation? If
not, surely we
preachers
must recog-
nize that
prayer is as
essential to
bringing a
message to life
as proper

exegesis, sermon structure and delivery. Yet, if the truth be known, most of us do not integrate the power of prayer into the preparation of the sermon. E. M. Bounds has noted that "he who plows not in his closet will not reap in his pulpit." Bounds further observed that "the character of our praying will determine the character of our preaching. Light praying makes light preaching." And a famous quote from Martin Luther states that "He who has prayed well has studied well."

Admittedly, Scripture has nothing directly to say about prayer and sermon preparation, but surely none of us who preach will deny that there is an integral link between the two. As we think together (preacher and listener alike) about the integration of prayer and preaching, there

preaching can be seen.

First, *prayer puts us in touch with God.* When we first bring our attention to the text of Scripture, prayer puts us in touch with the author of the word we are preparing to preach. Once a text is selected, begin by praising God for the truth revealed in His word. Express adoration for His wisdom and knowledge. Pray that your own view of God may be enlarged by the truth of the text to be preached. Worshipful prayer in the preparation process helps to get our attention off of self and onto God. How can we effectively preach the word of God when we are not in touch with the God of the word?

Second, *prayer puts us in touch with people.* In this case we see prayer as *intercession*. Effective preaching is preaching that meets real needs, but how can we prepare messages if, first, we do not know what the needs are, and second, we do not care what the needs are? Intercessory prayer helps us to care. Through prayer we become aware of the people around us, the people to whom we will preach and their needs. Through prayer we become more aware of the situation of others and how the text will address that situation. As we prepare to preach, let us pray for the people to whom we will preach.

Third, *prayer puts us in touch with ourselves.* There is an element of self **examination** in prayer. In his book *Authentic Preaching*, Arndt Halvorson writes that "Prayer is openness to our heart of hearts. It is the door to self **awareness**,

which is neither self **deception** nor self **destruction**." He went on to say, "Through prayer we can accept ourselves without succumbing to self **worship** and be self **critical** without self **hate**." To pray as did the Publican, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," is to be freed from pretention and driven to God in dependence, and we cannot help but to preach better when we are more dependent upon God than ourselves.

Fourth, *prayer puts us in touch with the word*. As we come to the text, would any suggest that it is inappropriate to ask God to help us to understand what He is saying? To be sure, we must give our very best personal efforts to sound interpretation, but we must not neglect to pray about the text(s) we have chosen to preach. Pray about what we do understand, and

pray about what we do not understand. Pray that God's word will not return to Him empty. And pray that His word will break through the barriers and defenses that people erect and bring conviction to their hearts.

Finally, *prayer before preaching imparts strength*. Before standing up to preach, speak with the Lord. Thank Him for this privilege. Pray that we will be used as His instrument and mouthpiece. In prayer let us seek His glory and not our own. Many a masterpiece on paper has failed because it was offered without prayer, and many a flawed sermon in delivery has soared and connected because it was baptized with prayer.

Sermons conceived, prepared and preached in the spirit of prayer are sermons that will be blessed by God and a blessing to the people who hear them.

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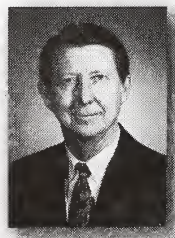
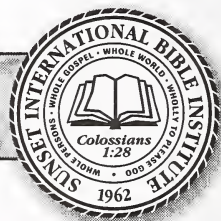
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.....Caution: Pride Ahead

driving around the state of North Carolina this time of year, one discovers the numerous road repair projects on interstates, state highways and city streets. Before approaching the construction site, there are always signs warning us of what's ahead. The warning is to put us on a high state of alert so we will not injure someone or be injured as we pass through the construction zone.

Ron Newberry

**"More
disagreements and
brotherly divisions
are related to
pride than any
other issue."**

There ought to be caution signs posted for us in life warning: CAUTION: PRIDE ZONE AHEAD. Human pride is one of man's most critically debilitating self-inflicted wounds.

More disagreements and brotherly divisions are related to pride than any other issue.

The book of Proverbs has numerous pearls of wisdom concerning pride.

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech"
(Proverbs 8:13, NIV)

"When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom"
(Proverbs 11:2)

"Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice"
(Proverbs 13:10)

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18)

Gordon MacDonald wrote about the old salts who liked to tell the story of the young sailor learning to become a navigator. Aboard the ship at sea, the captain said to him, "Please tell us where we are."

So the sailor took a sextant and made the complicated set of calculations. After a

while, he wrote down the coordinates of longitude and latitude and handed it to the captain.

The captain studied it for a while, checked his charts, and said to the young navigator, "Are you absolutely convinced that these are the right coordinates?"

"Yes, sir, I'm absolutely convinced."

"You know exactly where we are?"

"Yes, sir."

"There could be no conceivable mistake in your calculations?"

"Absolutely not, sir. I've done my best."

Then the captain said, "Well, then I would suggest you put on a jacket."

"Why, sir?"

"Because according to your calculations, we are planted squarely at the top of Mount Washington."

Proverbs 29:23 says, "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor."

Given texts like those quoted above, we might be inclined to agree with Hudson T. Armerding who wrote, "I am persuaded

that much of the confusion and conflict which besets the Christian church today is not due to great issues of theology. Instead, it is because brilliant leaders have not been willing to act with meekness.

Instead, they have gained a following and then, to maintain this following, have felt obliged to discredit those who would oppose them."

Ego and pride just seem to go hand-in-hand. Much of the conflict in the church is really more ego driven than text driven. Jealousy, ego, pride, feelings of self-importance are frequently at the heart of what some would have us believe are real biblical issues.

I shall never forget reading over twenty years ago an article in a magazine from a brother whose entire life and ministry has been devoted to digging up dirt and lambasting every work he doesn't deem fit for the church. He was preparing for an

extended trip outside the country and so he alerted his readers that he would be gone for several months. However, if there was any disturbance in the brotherhood that they couldn't handle while he was away, he could be back within twenty-four ours.

Pride indeed is a terrible sin because it frequently inflates itself at the expense of others. It damages, degrades and debases others. Someone has appropriately noted that a man all wrapped up in his own importance makes a mighty small package.

The apostle Peter wrote, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). The brotherhood could sure use a lot more humble leaders instead of so many caught up in a sense of their own importance. Maybe then we would have more peace and less quarrelling over non-scriptural issues.

BROTHERHOOD NEWS — Mark Hudson

MARIETTA, SC...

Palmetto Bible Camp will host its annual fall Youth Rally on September 17-19, 1999. Sam Soper will be the director. For information applications call Sam at (803) 685-5163.

RALEIGH, NC...

The Brooks Avenue Church of Christ will host the annual North Carolina Evangelism Seminar on September 17-19, 1999.

GREENSBORO, NC...

The Friendly Avenue Church of Christ is home

to a group called "Rainbow of Christians". This performance group has been in existence for 15 years, and they do a variety of skits that teach Biblical lessons. In August the group will travel to the Black River congregation in Jamaica for a nine day mission trip.

KINGSTREE, SC...

Students and staff from the *Central Carolina School of Preaching* are planning a campaign in Guyanna, South American for the first two weeks of December. Last year's mission trip resulted in 42 baptisms and

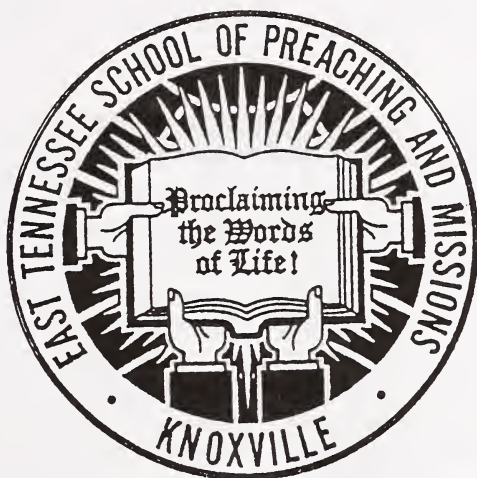
several restorations.

AIKEN, SC...

Phillip Murphy is serving the *Aiken Church of Christ* as a summer youth intern. Murphy is a Harding University graduate and has been accepted into USC Law School.

TIRANA, ALBANIA...

The *Christian Chronicle* reports that representatives from Partners In Progress, Manna International, Helping Hands International, and the Whites Ferry Road Church of Christ have journeyed together to Albania to explore the possibility of relief efforts.



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Why Marriages Fail

It is my practice in pre-marital counseling to point out to couples what I believe to be fundamental reasons for so many marriages ending in divorce. It is a combination of two factors: (1) the casual attitude towards divorce that is so prevalent

"I sincerely believe that a shared mutual commitment to meeting one another's needs is the first step toward building lasting marriages."

married, resulting in divorce.

In order to reverse the number of marriages ending in divorce, we must place more emphasis on the permanency of the marital bond and must also help couples to develop a more reasonable level of expectation regarding what marriage has to offer and how that which is offered is obtained. If the commitment aspect of marriage is properly presented, that alone will prove to be a giant first step towards the achievement of realistic expectations in marriage.

With regard to promoting commitment an emphasis needs to be given to the fact that in marriage we commit ourselves to seeking first the other person's happiness rather than our own. It has been my experience that couples tend to marry

Paul Jarrett

because they see their prospective mate as one who

will make *them* happy, and they divorce when it becomes plain that their mate is more concerned with his or her own self-interest. The point that both seem to miss is that their problems are due to the fact that they both are wanting to receive happiness from the other, but neither are wholly committed to giving happiness.

By way of clarification allow me to point out here that the solution to the problem I'm describing is not for one party to do all the giving. While couples need to be taught to give one hundred percent of themselves, it also has to be understood that happiness in marriage ultimately calls on both parties to develop an attitude of giving. This is seen in the words of Paul when he wrote, "Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:3).

Notice that both the husband and the wife are to be committed to fulfilling their duties to the other. While they both are to have a mutual commitment to this policy, it is foolish to assume that peace and harmony can be achieved if only one of the two has made that commitment. While one-sided commitment in marriage may have a religious ring to it, it is not really practical, nor biblical. When Paul wrote about the commitment made by the wife and by the husband in Ephesians 5 he spoke to each one of their respective responsibilities, but he prefaced his remarks by saying, "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

I sincerely believe that a shared mutual commitment to meeting one another's needs is the first step towards building lasting marriages. While the first step is in making this commitment the other person, the second step is to accept the fact that your mate has made a similar commitment to you.

This second step can be helped immensely by means of conversation and understanding. If we really believe that our mates want to make us happy to as great a degree as we want to make them happy, then we owe it to each other to make our needs known through honest, non-threatening conversation. It should be tempered with the realization that our mates

need room to grow and to develop the skills necessary to meet our needs. We may also have to accept the fact they may never be able to meet some of our needs to the degree that we might imagine (and it may simply be our imagination at work here) possible. In these instances we must be willing to compensate by focusing more on those areas where our mates do excel in meeting our needs, giving less attention to areas of dissatisfaction.

Many marriages are already better than the couple involved realize. All that is needed to make them truly happy is a shared commitment to each other coupled with a realistic level of expectation.

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The Life That Imitates God

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Terry Graves

God (Romans 8:29). By following the example of our

: Big Brother, we are also being like our
: Father.

: The apostle calls us to be "imitators of God." This exhortation follows a series of theological truths and commands found in Ephesians 4:17-32. There Paul reminds the church that Christians have put off the old self and "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." In light of this spiritual reality, we are to put off falsehood, anger, dishonesty, greed, unwholesome talk, bitterness and malice. We put on truth, self-control, honesty, generosity, wholesome talk, compassion and forgiveness. Paul is saying that we are to be

"God loves us just the way we are, but He also loves us too much to leave us that way."

Perhaps you have seen the advertisement with the little boy standing in his father's shoes, his little body swallowed up by his father's coat. Children have an innate desire to want to be like their parents. In this text the apostle Paul draws upon that natural tendency of children and says, in effect, "Act like your Father and follow the example of your big brother."

We were created in the image of our Father with the purpose in mind of reflecting His likeness, glory and love to one another and the rest of creation. The image of God can barely be recognized in fallen humans who are twisted and warped by sin and self-centeredness. Jesus Christ came to restore the image of God within us as He rescues us from the fall. Jesus Himself makes the invisible God visible. He is God in the flesh and as such reveals to us the one true God "up close and personal." Jesus is "the image of God" and in Him we see "the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6). Believers, in turn, have been "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of" the Son of Carolina Christian

: like this because God is like this.

: We are called to imitate the Father because of His gracious attitude and generous actions toward us, His "dearly loved children" (Ephesians 5:1). It is His graciousness and generosity that have made us His children. We imitate Him because we are in fact His children, not in order to become His children. We are already members of the heavenly family. Just like the little boy who wants to copy his daddy, so we are to copy our Father.

Further, to imitate our Father, Paul says, is to live a life of love (Ephesians 5:2). Before we can do that, we must first understand what love is. Love is God's primary motivating attribute. As John affirms, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). The primary characteristic of love itself is that it gives. To see what our Father has given we must look at the cross. "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us." Thus, if we are to imitate God, we must love. And we must love the way Jesus loved, giving ourselves to and for others. Love, therefore, can be defined as the steadfast direction of my will for the welfare of another person.

So, following Christ and imitating God means giving ourselves up to love. Selflessness and self-giving are pleasing to the Father. As with Christ, so it is with us that self-sacrificing love is "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Sacrificial love for others (my family, my brother or sister in Christ, a coBworker, a friend, an enemy, an unsaved neighbor) is the crest of the family of God.

God loves us just the way we are, but He also loves us too much to leave us that way. He wants us to change family loyalties (from the family of Satan to His family) and invites us to imitate Him. Indeed, the Father wants to change us into the likeness of His favorite Son, Jesus Christ.

Terry Graves ministers to the Shelby church in Shelby, NC. He can be contacted at 845 W. Warren St., Shelby, NC 28150.

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In Search of Renewal: Part 5

The Worship of God.....

Phil Stapp

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21-24).

Since the beginning of time the worship of God has been problematic for humankind. Cain was the first and was followed by the likes of Jacob, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Saul and numerous generations of Israelites. In the time of Jesus the worship of God had again degenerated into empty ritual, rituals that could not even be agreed upon by the various sects within Judaism or the Samaritans.

Today we face many of the same problems. The principle concern in worship for many churches is how to do it, not what it is. This has led to a lack of awe and reverence for God. The reality of the almighty and holy God is missing and men and women are not in awe and fear of the Lord during worship. The words of Jesus apply to many today, “They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Mark 7:7).

Some within churches of Christ are calling for renewal in worship. Most of the efforts to renew worship, however, have

focused on changing the way things are done. Simply changing forms will not renew worship. This usually ends up in the exchanging of one set of empty rituals for another. Real renewal in worship comes from the heart. Without humble, loving, obedient hearts, our acts of worship mean nothing (see Isaiah 1:11-17 and 29:13). To renew worship we must follow Jesus in worshipping God in spirit and truth.

It is important to understand that the biblical definition of worship is to be at the center of everything that the church believes, practices, and seeks to accomplish. As we see in the life of Jesus, all of life is to be an act of worship service to God (see Rom. 12:1), but there is something special about God’s people coming together to worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Worship is the glorification of God, in Christ, by the Spirit for the edification of the church. In worship we praise God for his holiness and celebrate his supreme worth. It is the believer’s response of all that he or she is to all that God is and for all that he has done for us in Christ. We do this by confessing our unworthiness, giving thanks for his love and grace, and committing ourselves to his purposes.

Worship is not a ceremony in which we seek to please or manipulate God. It is an act of sacrifice that opens us to his seeking and draws us into his presence. In his presence we are transformed into his likeness. This is the purpose of worship.

God does not call us to worship him because he needs our worship. He calls us to

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worship because we need to come into his presence and be transformed. Worship in spirit and truth contributes something powerful and lasting to our personalities, our relationship, our service, and our total lives as Christians. We become like the God that we worship (Ps. 115:8). What we are and what we do are both determined by what we worship.

When we participate in biblical worship we are freed from the self-preoccupation and self-interests. We worship God because he is worthy, not because we get something out of it. When we do this, we will get something out of worship, a transformed life that is humble and obedient to the will of God. Then we will be living sacrifices, worshipping him with our entire lives.

In the Old Testament God utilized sacred places (such as Mount Sinai, the Tabernacle and the Temple), and sacred times (such as the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths) as continual reminders to the people of his goodness, love and glory. He then demanded sacred actions (such as circumcision, purification rites, sacrifices and obedience to the law) from the people. These sacred actions were to be an outward expression of the fact that their God was holy and that they, therefore, were to be a holy (or separated) people.

Today, in Jesus Christ, we are called to a sacred place (the community of Christ) at a sacred time (the first day of the week) to participate in sacred actions (such as prayer, song and the Lord's Supper). This sacred time empowers us to live sacred lives in the world. We, like Israel, are reminded that we are a holy (separated) people and are to live our lives in obedience to the God we worship.

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In worship we find the real motivation and power to do the work that God gives us to do. Men and women worshipping in spirit and truth will be vehicles of God's love and their lives will speak of the power and the presence of the God they have come to know and love in worship. When we come together in worship, we come into the presence of God. In the presence of God we are cleansed and empowered to carry out his purpose in the world.

Our worship together is not meant to be a time when the minister ministers and the congregation congregates. Worship is not something done for the people but by them. The role of leaders in worship is not to perform rituals or to entertain, but to engage every person in attendance in the active worship of God. Only when all are actively involved in the worship of God does worship become meaningful for all.

Worship is not an optional extra; it is the very life and essence of the Church. Worshipping God in spirit and truth means our worship must be spiritual and real. Real worship will permeate every aspect of our lives in Christ, but living a life of worship begins by learning the life of worship in our time together in the presence of God. When we are a worshipping community, coming together into the presence of God, we find our lives transformed, healed and empowered for service in the world.

Our entire life as disciples of Christ flows from the worship of God. Let us do it with all of our hearts in spirit and truth.

*Phil Stapp ministers to the Brewer Rd. church.
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His Soul Was Thirsty

he remembers a time during his childhood when he attended worship every Sunday. Though the sermons always seemed too long, he appreciated the loving attention the preacher gave him. He also remembers the other folks fondly. The hugs, the pats on the head and occasional packs of Chicklets from those gentle people were all part of happier days.

It was a happiness he was sure could never be restored.

Now his life was a tangle of confusing problems. As if the rumors about his plant shutting down weren't bad enough, his marriage was going sour. He hadn't felt very well lately, either. Though he knew he should get a physical, he was afraid the doctor would discover something serious, and he didn't need any more problems. But even more than his physical health, he was concerned about his mental health. He was afraid that he was going crazy.

Even when his other burdens were pushed out of his mind, he felt a profound sadness inside. It was like a hunger he couldn't satisfy. Of course, he couldn't tell anyone about that feeling, or they would think he was crazy, too. So he kept his secret, tried to work, and tried to salvage his marriage, but the sadness just kept increasing.

Over several months he devoured every book he could find on the subjects of depression and self-esteem. They offered a lot of fascinating insights, but

Tim Kraus

brought no permanent relief to his thirsty soul.

So, he picked up his old Bible, a gift from his fourth grade Sunday School teacher. He was intrigued by the story of how Adam and Eve lost Eden **and happiness** when they rebelled against God. It reminded him of something his preacher had said years before. "Jesus is the photographic negative of Adam. What we lost because of Adam's disobedience, we gain back through Jesus' loving obedience."

That memory drove him to search the Bible for more information about Jesus. Maybe he was more than a mythical character from childhood after all. Maybe He was the answer to this enveloping sadness.

What he found convinced him that Jesus cared about his problems. The Master's tender care for children, His healing of the suffering and His rescue of the downtrodden proved His compassion. And His ultimate act of love, dying on a cross to pay for the sin of others, verified Jesus' desire to lift this crushing burden of guilt.

Then he read some wonderful promises! "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow within him."

And with great relief, he came and drank deeply.

Guitar Lessons

all college students need spending money. I made mine by giving guitar lessons. I knew the mechanics of music. I knew how the guitar was built. I understood the fret board and its relationship to the scale. I had listened to enough guitar music to know the quality my students should strive toward and could tell when they had done something wrong. And I knew what they would have to do to correct the problem. But, I didn't play the guitar!

Still don't. My problem is that I lack discipline. I don't want to practice the absolute minimum of an hour a day. There are others things that need to be done! Further, I lack desire. I just don't want to cut my fingernails and develop callouses on the ends of my fingers. And I lack courage. It seems that once you learn to play an instrument, people expect you to perform and I certainly don't want that.

It occurs to me that sometimes our spiritual lives are much the same. We know the mechanics of Christianity. We can give book, chapter and verse. We know how we are made: body, soul and spirit. We understand our relationship to the Master. We have listened to enough sermons and watched enough faithful lives to know what quality of life we should strive toward. We know when we have erred and we know what measures need to be taken to correct the problem. But still, too often we don't live the life.

We lack discipline. We don't spend a consistent time each day in prayer with the Father or in His word. We lack desire. We don't want to change our worldly habits or develop callouses on our knees. We lack courage. We

Rita Watson

don't want the world around us to see us as different from

themselves. They might ask questions or expect more than we want to give. They might hate us or even kill us!

The problem with having an instructor like me is that my students never really excelled. I could never pass on to them the passion for performing because I don't have it. I could never empathize with my students about the struggle for perfection because I never experienced it! I could never take them to great heights.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. Until we truly struggle to be perfect as God is perfect, to follow in Jesus' steps, we will never be able to empathize with others. Until we develop a passion for righteous living we will never be able to pass on the passion. We will never take others to the height of heaven.

I hope my students didn't suffer too much for having me as an instructor, but I fear that there was one who probably never touched the guitar again after our classes that year. I could not build a love for the instrument in her. Perhaps she is no worse off for that.

In our spiritual walk we have much more at stake. We are to be the salt of the earth, to create in others a thirst for righteousness. We are to make disciples and build a love for God. However, it will never happen until we desire righteousness ourselves, until we practice discipline, and until we boldly go out into the world.

In other words, it is not enough to simply teach. We must also be able to play.

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Let's Just Be Friends

How many of you have had to tell that to someone? Or even worse, how many of you have had someone tell *you* that they just want to be friends? It's not the most pleasant thing to go through regardless of which side of the conversation you're on. So, my question is why do we do that to God? So many of us want to "just be friends" with God instead of having a close, personal relationship.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says that Christians "are being transformed into His (God's) likeness with every increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit." And again Paul says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is "His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2).

In both these verses, the word Paul uses for "transformed" is the same word used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus. The Greek word is *metamorphomai*, which is obviously where we get the word "metamorphosis." A metamorphosis is a complete change. As Christians, we are to be completely changed. We're to be different from the world. The apostle Peter refers to us as Aliens and strangers in the world@ (1 Peter 2:11). If we have been changed and transformed by Christ, then we will be different from

Bryan Dill the rest of the world. But why do we want to be different from the rest of the world? We all want to be accepted by everyone at school. There's nothing wrong with that. So, how are we supposed to be different? That will come naturally when we stop "just being friends" with God. If we study His word and are involved in a close relationship with Him through prayer and worship, then we will know when we're supposed to be different. We will know when to say "no." We will know what not to get involved in.

So now the question lies in your hands. Are you involved in a relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you talk to God every day? Do you thank God every day for the innumerable blessings you have? Do you ask Him for help with your problems? Or, are you just a casual friend with Him? Do you just "go to church" and just talk to God through others at church and the occasional mealtime prayer? Do you do things at school and home that you would never do at church? We *all* need to strive for a closer relationship with the Father. We need to let Him influence every decision we make. We need to be more than "just friends."

Bryan Dill is a member of the Hendersonville, NC, church and a junior at Harding University. You can contact him at Harding University, Box 10089, Searcy, AR 72149, or by e-mail at: pbc23@yahoo.com.

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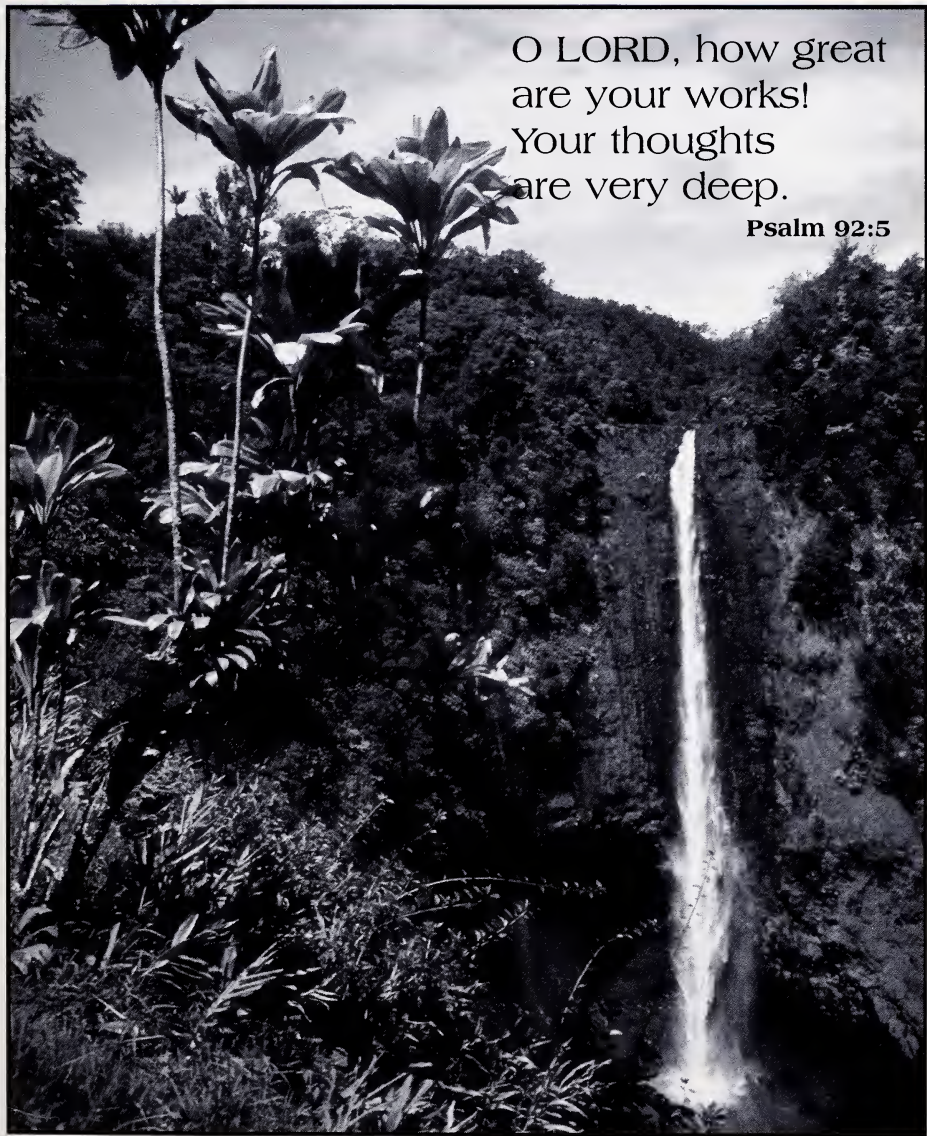
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O LORD, how great
are your works!
Your thoughts
are very deep.

Psalm 92:5



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Suffering and the Works of God.

the question of suffering has

always been a thorn in the side of both those who believe and those who want to believe in God. For believers, many of us have always had a difficult time reconciling the "evil" of suffering with

Dennis Conner

superstition of the day (a superstition that still

While the disciples wondered if someone's sinfulness was the reason for the man's blindness, others wonder why bad things happen to good people.

our own perceptions of a loving and merciful God. Sometimes the best we can do is to simply acknowledge that God's ways are not our ways and

survives in many parts of the world), "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Their perspective was that suffering is the result of sin. To be sure, sometimes it is. We often invite suffering into our experience because of our own foolish, sinful choices, but that was not the case with this man. Many people suffer at the hands of illnesses and catastrophes not of their own making. How are we to view those kinds of circumstances? We may find an answer to that question in Jesus' response to the disciples.

The Lord answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him," (verse 3). Jesus' perspective is that through suffering the marvelous power and work of God is manifested in many different ways. In the immediate context that meant the giving of sight to the blind man, his coming to faith in Christ, and Jesus' use of the man's former blindness to rebuke the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. However, I believe that it is also valid for us to be open to the ways that God manifests His works in our suffering today.

His thoughts are not our thoughts, trusting the ultimate will of the Father. That is an entirely appropriate response, but it does not necessarily keep us from our often inordinate fear of suffering. As for those who want to believe, the existence of suffering is often a stumblingblock to faith. Many cannot quite get past the seeming hurdle of inconsistency between suffering's evil and God's supposed power and benevolence. An incident in John 9 might offer some help both groups. From this incident we learn that what we make of suffering is a matter of perspective.

In John 9 Jesus and His disciples encounter an unfortunate man who had been blind from birth. The disciples ask a question that reflects the popular

This truth has been brought powerfully home to me through the experience of one of the greatest people of faith I have ever known my wife, Terre. Already possessing (in my estimation) a great heart for God, she longed for more of Him and a few months ago began praying that God would draw her even

closer to Him. It was a prayer that she offered over and over, not knowing when or how the Father would answer.

On March 26 of this year Terre received her answer. It was (for my part, especially) unwanted and unexpected. The answer came from the lips of her doctor: *cancer*. The day before she was to leave for a five week mission trip to Ukraine, Terre was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her trip was canceled and surgery followed to remove the lump. Then the pathology report, which brought more hard news: eight lymph nodes tested positive for cancer. More tests followed and our fears were confirmed. Another small tumor was found on her upper spine. "And you call this an answer to prayer?" Yes, she does.

There have been, of course, tears shed at various points along the way, but in conversations with friends and church family Terre often invokes the language of praise. She asked God to draw her closer to Him, and He is doing it through this illness. Not that she *wants* to be sick, mind you, but she is thankful for all that the Father is teaching her through this sickness. He has taught her valuable lessons about waiting on Him, patience, and the beauty of each and every day. Her prayers have taken on an even greater intensity at times. She is not able to assemble with her brothers and sisters as often as she would like and being around lots of people wear her out, worship is even more vital and meaningful.

Carolina Christian

Further, God is using her illness to open doors of opportunity with non-Christian friends of ours. While those friends have always loved and respected Terre, they are being moved and deeply effected by the faith she displays. As one couple told her recently when they came to our home for a visit, "Terre, you have inspired us with the way you're dealing with this." They then shared that what they have seen in her has led them to renewed thought about their relationship with God. For all of these evidences of God's work in her life and the lives of others, she praises Him and gives Him the glory. She sees herself as a willing student for whatever lessons the Father desires to teach her. I see her as a work of poetry in progress, a masterpiece of God's creative power. We both try to see her illness from Jesus' perspective in John 9:3. It has happened this way so that the works of God might be revealed in her.

There is also another side to this matter. While the disciples wondered if someone's sinfulness was the reason for the man's blindness, others wonder why bad things happen to good people. One Christian sister, while talking with Terre, confessed that "I'm having a hard time with this. I just don't understand why God would let someone like you get sick like this." To which Terre replied, "Why not someone like me?" She then went on to share with the sister some of the works of God that are being revealed to her through her illness. The Jesus perspective gives meaning and some

degree of understanding to virtually all sides of the problem of suffering.

As for Terre's prospects, the prognosis is that there is a 75% chance that in five years she will be cancer free (but not cured). Hopefully, at that time, we will be able to take advantage of any new advances in cancer treatment. As for now, she has a long road ahead of her still. She has been taking an aggressive chemotherapy treatment and will soon have a stem cell transplant (bone marrow transplant), to be followed by more chemo and then radiation therapy. Terre does not enjoy feeling bad and in time will feel even worse, but she is

willing to walk this path if it will take her closer to God.

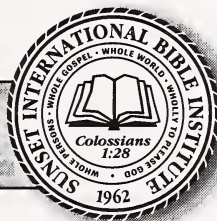
And as for the two of us, the Jesus perspective has allowed us not only to cope and endure, but also to thrive and grow in our relationship with each other and in our joint relationship with the Father.

Please keep Terre in your prayers. The outpouring of prayer and love to date has been simply overwhelming. But keep praying for her, that the works of God might continue to be revealed in and through her.

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Virgil and Joy Yocham



Branding People.

there is a story of a New York family that decided to leave the Big Apple and head for the wide open spaces. They decided to buy a ranch out west and raise cattle. A month later some of their friends visited the ranch and asked if they had chosen a name for their 200 acre spread.

The man said, "Well, I wanted to name it Bar-B since my name is Bob. The wife wanted to call it the Suzy-Q after her own name. One of the boys, Willie, who wants to be a pilot, wanted to name it the Flying-W. Larry insisted we call it the Lazy-L. So in the end for the sake of family unity, we named it the Bar-B/Suzy-Q/Flying-W/Lazy-L."

His friend was impressed with the man's sense of compromise. But then he looked over the fence and asked, "But where are all the cattle?" The rancher looked sheepishly at the ground, kicked the dirt and replied, "None of them survived the branding."

We are forever trying to brand people with this label and that label. Labels are nothing but verbal prejudice. If we can stick someone into a convenient pigeon hole, then we don't have to consider them as individuals. We know what they are like because, "All _____ are like that." When congregations or individuals are labeled "liberal," for example, everyone knows what they are like because all liberals are... And when congregations are labeled "conservative" everyone else knows what they are like because all

Ron Newberry

conservatives are...

If you recall, Jesus was labeled a glutton, a drunkard and a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34). Once conveniently labeled, the Jewish leaders knew what he was like and they could justify not investigating him personally and objectively.

Before we are quick to slap a brand on someone, remember that most folks don't survive the branding. Do you want others to brand you? Then don't do it to others. That one rule for living would go a long way toward dispelling all prejudices and enhance everyone's life in the Son.

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Sound Doctrine

But as for you,
speak the things
which are fitting for sound
doctrine," (Titus 2:14).

Whether it is in the pulpit, a Bible class with a group or an individual, or in the pages of a journal, I always make it my aim to do as the apostle Paul instructed Titus to do in our text. I believe it is my responsibility as a preacher to speak only those things which are fitting for sound doctrine. In order to do this, I must know what constitutes sound doctrine.

The literal meaning of sound doctrine is "healthy words." In its broadest sense all of God's word may be thought of as sound doctrine in keeping with the sentiments expressed in the following proverb and psalm:

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones,"
(Proverbs 16:24).

"... The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether... Sweeter also than the drippings of the honeycomb,"
(Psalms 19:9-10).

Good health requires that we eat good food in proper proportion. If we are going to enjoy spiritual good health, we must do the same. We must take a balanced approach to our handling of the word of God. We need to be "nourished in the words of the faith and sound doctrine... but have nothing to do with worldly fables" (1 Timothy 4:6-7). We must not wrangle about words." Instead, we need to be "handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:14-15).

Paul Jarrett

It will help us to do this if we give attention to the

kind of things the apostle Paul chose to talk about when he spoke of sound doctrine. For example, he first talked about the character traits God desired men and women, young and old, to possess (Titus 2:2-8). Then he wrote to servants about the need to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (Titus 2:9-10). He then challenged all who have been the recipients of God's grace to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly" in this present life (Titus 2:11-12).

At the heart of Paul's call for sound doctrine lay his appeal for God's people to be "zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). This readiness to do every good deed is to manifest itself in our treatment of others. We are not to live like those in the world, but rather we are to live lives which in our treatment of others reflect the kindness we have received God (see Titus 3:1-7). These words provide a concise summation of Paul's view of what constitutes sound doctrine:

"This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless" (Titus 3:8-9).

Paul Jarrett ministers to the Naples Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

.....A Soldier Finishes His Fight

*a*ll of us here at *Carolina Christian* express our deepest sympathies to the family of David Miller, who passed from this life on the morning of June 26, 1999. He is survived by his loving wife, Kay, his daughter, Karen George, his two sons, Eric and David, and all their respective families.

Brother Miller was a long-time member of the Providence Rd. church of Christ in Charlotte, NC, and had served the congregation as a deacon and then an elder in the past. He served the Charlotte community in banking from 1957 to

retirement in 1997. Dave also served on the Board of Directors of Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center and spent a week every summer working at the camp. He was remembered in a memorial service at the Providence Rd. church on June 29 and was laid to rest in the cemetery at the Jericho church of Christ in Mocksville, NC.

The family has requested that memorial donations be made to:
Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center, 1988 Jericho Church Rd. Mocksville, NC 27028.

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I've Just Been Thinking.....

Not long ago, my wife, Ann,

Norman Bales

started a sentence by saying, "I've just been thinking..." When she told me what she was thinking, she verbalized thoughts that were identical to mine.

Don't ask me to identify the subject. This little exercise in communication takes place on a regular basis regarding numerous topics.

Other variations of this phenomenon take place frequently. Sometimes we finish sentences for one another. On another occasion, one of us might suggest going out to a certain restaurant for supper, not knowing the other one had been thinking about that restaurant all day. On occasion something said in a sermon or Bible class will make a deep impression on both our minds, even though we didn't say a word about it before we get in the car to go home.

Our experience is not unique to our marriage. Many couples, who have been married over a long period of time, report similar phenomena. We know each other's shoe sizes, food preferences, entertainment tastes opinions about politics, etc. If I were so inclined, I could probably write a book on *The Peculiar Habits of Ann that Most People Never Know*. I'm not so inclined. If I were, she would probably get a court order to prevent publication.

Most people think that such thorough Carolina Christian

knowledge of one's spouse indicates the existence of intimacy. Perhaps it does and perhaps it doesn't. Such knowledge might well be superficial in its nature.

It's one thing to know the lyrics of your spouse's favorite song. It's quite another to know what excites, offends, inspires, hurts, touches and irritates your spouse. There's not much threat involved in making sure you know which brand of toothpaste your spouse prefers, but there could be an enormous amount of threat in finding out what he or she really thinks about the quality of your relationship.

Quality marriages exist when we tactfully disclose ourselves to one another and when we open our hearts to hear those things we really don't want to hear. It involves the implementation of the principle expressed in James 5:16. "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed."

Norman Bales may be contacted at 9080 Southwood Dr., Shreveport, Louisiana 71118. This article is reprinted with permission from the All About Families Newsletter, July 21, 1999. The AAF Newsletter is a weekly online newsletter. To subscribe by e-mail, write: nlbales@allaboutfamilies.org.

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Even When We Mess Up.

With this article Danny Boggs completes more than two years as the editor of the "Youth Matters" column. The focus of Danny's present ministry as associate minister of the Hendersonville church precludes his continuing as the editor of this column. Danny is a wonderfully talented young man whose love for God and people is evident in the way he writes. All of us at Carolina Christian wish to express our gratitude to Danny for his contributions to the ministry of Carolina Christian and pray for God's richest blessings on his ministry.

Danny Boggs

was walking in her neighborhood and encountered a

lady who lived nearby. The neighbor began telling her of a recent experience. The mother of three small children, she was worn to a frazzle after spending several days in a row with them in the house. She needed some time to herself, so her husband agreed to watch the kids while she went jogging. As she was running through her mountainside neighborhood and feeling sorry for herself, she stopped at a peak that allowed her to overlook the town far below. While pausing to enjoy the view, she heard a beautiful sound floating toward her from a nearby backyard. She looked down to see our group of teens singing praises to God. She was refreshed by the sounds and words of songs like "I Stand in Awe" and "Make Me a Servant." Perhaps a door is now open for the good news, too!

If God can work such wonders in us even when we mess up, imagine what He can do with a life lived in constant submission to Him! "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever, amen," (Ephesians 2:20-21).

Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791, or by e-mail at: dannyboggs@juno.com.

When Paul talked about the gospel, he said, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God," (2 Corinthians 4:7). It is so amazing what God can do with His gospel through people who are weak and often mess up. "He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust," (psalm 103:14), but He knows how to use us to bring glory to Himself.

We recently had one of our teen devotionals at the home of some members of our congregation. It wasn't a good night. Several kids who should have been setting the pace for the rest of the group had been rather disrespectful to the adults. When confronted, they were all the more disrespectful. The night seemed a waste. At least that's what we thought.

A couple of days later our hostess Carolina Christian

.....Faith: Not a Blind Leap

Faith used to be a mystery to me; I thought it was something one either had, or didn't. To gain more faith, a person had to try harder to believe. But I soon found myself struggling to believe in Christ because it was the right thing to do, not because there was reasonable evidence for believing. I was afraid *not* to believe, for I realized that my whole system of values was based on faith in God. However, my faith was more in faith itself than in God.

Now I am convinced that faith is not such a vague, nebulous quality after all. Instead of a "blind leap in the dark," faith is a rational walk into light! "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" is faith's biblical description (Hebrews 11:1 NIV).

But what brings about that confidence in the reality of things unseen? Does faith simply "fall from heaven" on certain favored people while most of us are left to muddle through our doubts? Thankfully, the answer is "no." In fact, it begins with a cognitive process.

Tim Kraus

"When a person is willing to give the Scriptures a fair hearing, God's word will produce belief."

Our faith grows as we learn God's truth. As Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Solid, lasting trust in Christ emerges from comprehending the testimony of reliable witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Him. Jesus said that "every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me," (John 6:45). And in explaining why he had written his account of Christ's life, John said,

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31).

When a person is willing to give the Scriptures a fair hearing, God's word will produce belief. God has provided the basis for a growing, confident faith. He has given us the information necessary for honest seekers of truth to make the decision to trust in Him.

Tim Kraus lives in Conneaut, OH. He has been preaching for the church there since 1977.

Why Preachers Quit Preaching

after almost thirty years of preaching among churches of Christ, I have seen a number of men quit preaching and take up secular occupations. In a few cases, this was for the best. Some were men who had a weakness for alcohol. One was a collector of pornography and had an ego problem as well. Another was convicted of child molestation. Others became involved in immoral relationships with other women.

These were exceptions to the rule, however. Most were good men who had accomplished much in benefiting the cause of Christ. So why did they quit? In random order, the following reasons are those that I have heard the men themselves express, or that I have personally observed.

Some gave up full-time preaching because of criticism. The brethren for whom they sacrificed and worked and prayed rewarded them with criticism and nit-picking until good men decided they had had enough of that kind of abuse and left off the ministry of preaching. Yes, Jesus suffered abuse and we should be willing to suffer as well, but abuse is easier to bear when it comes from outside the church. It is far more painful when it comes at the hands of our own brethren. In many cases preachers are given more respect by those outside the church than by their own brethren! That simply shouldn't be the case.

Others give up preaching because of

Jim Mullican

the hardships that are placed on their families.

Their wives are expected to be involved in every work, to host showers, and to attend every gathering, even if it's a Stanley party given by someone in the church. And just when their children are making friends and getting involved in school activities, they are often forced to move. Further, if the wife has a job outside the home, she sometimes is pressured to leave it. So, some men quit preaching in order to settle down and stay in one place, like everyone else.

Economic hardship is another reason some quit. Many churches today do not support their preachers adequately, and I have been fortunate enough to work with such generous brethren, but not all preachers are so fortunate. Within the past two years I saw an advertisement in which a church sought a full-time preacher for \$250 per week. That's hardly minimum wage! Another thing that happens is that a salary which was once adequate is not increased annually, so that the preacher's income actually shrinks. One dedicated preacher, with tears in his eyes, told me that the other teens in his congregations usually went out for pizza for hamburgers on Sunday night after worship, but his didn't because he didn't have the money to give them. He had not received an increase in support for several years and no one in the congregation seemed to care. That man now teaches school to support his family and continues to preach for a

smaller congregation near his home.

Many men in our congregations work for companies that provide good retirement plans, but few churches provide such benefits for their preachers. When a man of age forty or fifty realizes that he faces a bleak financial future he may leave the pulpit in order to provide some degree of financial security for his family.

Insurance is another reason for many seeking employment outside the preaching ministry. Those of us with pre-existing medical conditions find health insurance unobtainable at all or prohibitively expensive when purchased individually. Many employers provide health

insurance for their employees at a reasonable cost. While this may seem like a small consideration to some, those who have spent time in a hospital where a week's stay may cost as much as a new car know that it is not. A single major illness, accident or surgery can easily cost more than most preachers have.

Another reason that some leave the preaching ministry is loneliness. The preacher and his family always have many acquaintances but often few close friends. Those outside the church are often afraid to develop close friendships for fear of becoming targets of conversion. Those in the church may be reluctant to become



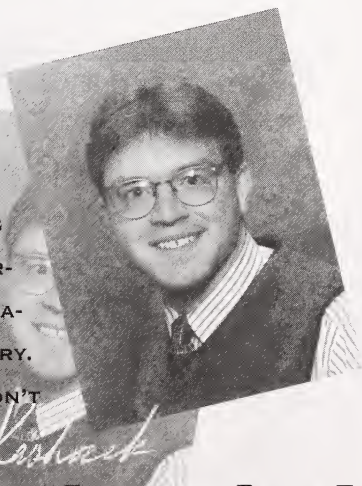
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close friends with someone they see as "only temporary," or perhaps for fear of having the preacher see their own failings and weaknesses. However, it should surprise no one to know that preachers and their families have failings and weaknesses, too. Preachers will show as much love and concern for their imperfect friends as they will anyone else yet will not abuse the friendship by publicly exposing private matters. We have no right to become judges.

If the churches wish to curtail this loss of good men from our pulpits, they should take steps to meet the needs that have been mentioned. Bridle loose

tongues. Treat the preacher's family like any other family in the congregation. Support them adequately. Give annual raises. Enable them to buy a house and settle down. Provide retirement plans and health insurance. Reach out to the preacher and his family in genuine love and friendship. Let them know you truly love and appreciate them. Do these things and not only will good men want to stay, but they will work even harder than ever and the church will be the beneficiary.

Jim Mullican, a former Associate Editor for Carolina Christian, can be contacted at 1301 Sheldon Rd., Channelview, TX 77530.

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.....Two Questions: Part One

Y ou're in luck!
This issue of

Stephen J. Walls-Mathis

We may talk a good talk,
but there is no life-giving

Carolina Christian offers you, at no extra charge, a crash course in biblical interpretation. Some people (present company included) go to college for years and years, spending thousands of dollars they don't have to learn something that is, more or less, common sense. Here it is, free of charge: A Quick Guide to Interpreting Scripture. Just ask these two questions: 1. What? 2. So what? Sounds simple, doesn't it? I have to warn you, though; taking these questions seriously, as we should, can lead to a radical transformation in your life.

In the articles in this series we will take the letter to the Colossians as a "test case" for our two questions. We will consider the "what" questions of Colossians. What does the letter say? Who was it written by and to whom was it written? When, where and why was it written? What kind of literature is this? What are the central themes in the text?

These are all important questions. We need to take the Bible seriously and try to understand what we read in its context. Looking at the setting, the reasons behind the writing, the type of literature it is, will help to guard against dragging verses kicking and screaming from their context to say whatever we want them to say.

However, as significant as the "what" questions are, we can't leave it at that. If all we do is answer question one, then the Bible is simply another old book we're trying to figure out. Interpretation becomes a purely academic and intellectual pursuit. The world will be quick to respond, "yeah, whatever."

substance in our study of the word without wrestling with the second question.

So what? What difference does this text make in my life? How will understanding, believing and putting this text into practice in my life affect my daily life? What is God calling me to do here and now? What basic assumptions about life and faith are challenged by this word from God?

You see the difference, don't you? The first question asks, "What does God have to say?" The second asks, "What difference does that make in my life?" Faithful study of God's word requires us to ask both questions and take the answers seriously. What does Colossians have to say? What difference does that make to me?

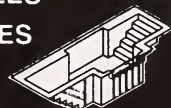
May the God of all grace guide our questions.

*Stephen J. Walls-Mathis may be contacted at
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In Search of Renewal: Part 6

Spiritual Leadership

Phil Stapp

Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:25-28).

In his book, *Activating the Passive Church*, Lyle Schaller lists twenty-six common sources of congregational passivity. Many are directly related to leadership problems in the church. They include:

1. A congregation's mission being eroded and replaced by a priority on institutional self-preservation;
2. Limited emphasis on evangelism, education, nurture, missions or widespread involvement in community ministries;
3. The strong willed authoritarian leadership style;
4. Building the most visible and satisfying components of ministry around the performance of paid staff members;
5. Unresolved conflicts and/or anxiety producing experiences;
6. A widespread feeling that ideas, suggestions and criticisms of the membership are being ignored or rejected by the leadership;
7. Limited opportunities for spiritual growth;
8. The basic motivating force is guilt.

These are just some of the many problems that can be created by poor leadership in a congregation. God's desire

has always been that his leaders point the people to their true leader, the Lord God.

Godly leadership finds its definition and role within the ministry of Christ. Church leaders today often get caught up in worldly models of leadership and authority which hinder people from finding God. To find a model of leadership that points people to God we need only to look to Jesus. But the study of Jesus does not provide us with a manual on "How to be a leader like Jesus." Rather it shows us how Jesus points us to God and how he can point others to God through us. The heart of leadership is not in mastering the "how tos," but in being mastered by the amazing grace of God.

How does Jesus lead through us as we give ourselves to him and the power of God? He leads through us in the same way he led while on earth with the heart of a servant, the vision of God, the love of a shepherd and a clear voice.

The Heart of a Servant

In the Son of God we find the greatest of servants. This is evident in that he was God in the flesh, giving up his heavenly home to live and die as a human being so that we can share in his heavenly home (see Colossians 2:5-11). At his baptism and transfiguration God says, "You are my Son." Through his life, ministry and death Jesus answers, "I am your servant."

His use of power and authority was always to serve. They were used in humility to transform and liberate, not to frighten and control. Jesus never imposed them on others, but rather exposed them to those in need. For Jesus, servant leadership was a reality of his life; it was his very being; he had the heart of a servant.



The Vision of God

Jesus' service was a direct outgrowth of his vision. He had the vision of God for his own ministry and for others. This gave him a clear sense of transcendent purpose. His vision gave him a clear image of God's will for his life and ministry.

Vision involves seeing in your mind's eye God's view of the way the future should be. It requires that a leader know God, have insight into their own strengths and weaknesses and understand the circumstances and ministry environment around them. A visionary church leader is one who has replaced the sense of personal ambition with a burning desire to see God's plan implemented in the church.

The Love of a Shepherd

In John 10, Jesus describes himself as the "good shepherd." The idea of being a shepherd is a key biblical principle of leadership. The loving relationship between the shepherd and the sheep defines the role of a shepherd. Jesus says that he is not a hired hand (John 10:11-13) who runs away when faced with danger, rather he is the good shepherd who loves his sheep and lays down his life for them. Sacrificial love is what defines a leader as a shepherd.

When a leader loves those they are leading, certain priorities are established for the leader. Jesus' first priority was the salvation and protection of his sheep. This must be the top priority for church leaders today. This means being involved in the lives of people. It is more than making decisions and solving problems. It is the sharing of self with others.

Another priority of Jesus was to enable others to realize God's vision and power for their lives. Shepherds today need to empower others to do the work of God. Barnabas had a wonderful gift of encouraging and preparing others to carry out the

work of God in their lives. Like him, leaders today must sacrifice themselves to care for others and prepare them to do what God wants them to do.

A Clear Voice

Integral to all aspects of leadership mentioned above is good communication. Jesus was a master of communicating to people in a language they understood. But communication in some churches is a hit-or-miss situation. Many view communication as making pronouncements or handing down decisions. But the visionary servant/shepherd will want to communicate effectively with the congregation.

Jesus presents us with a powerful model of clear, honest, simple and aware communication. The leader who is seeking to serve, shepherd and see as Christ does will want to communicate openly, clearly and simply. There will be an awareness of self, others, the situation and, most importantly, God. Effective communication will allow the leader to serve more completely, share God's vision more clearly and shepherd more effectively.

None of the attributes discussed here are exclusively for leaders. They are attributes that all Christians should be seeking to develop as they mature in Christ. In our leaders, however, we are looking for those individuals who have already developed this level of maturity and can show the rest of us the way. This is why it is so important for us to have leaders who motivate us to do more than we expected to do, by raising our awareness of different values and by getting us to transcend our self-interests for the cause of Christ.

Phil Stapp serves the Brewer Rd. Church of Christ, 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27127.

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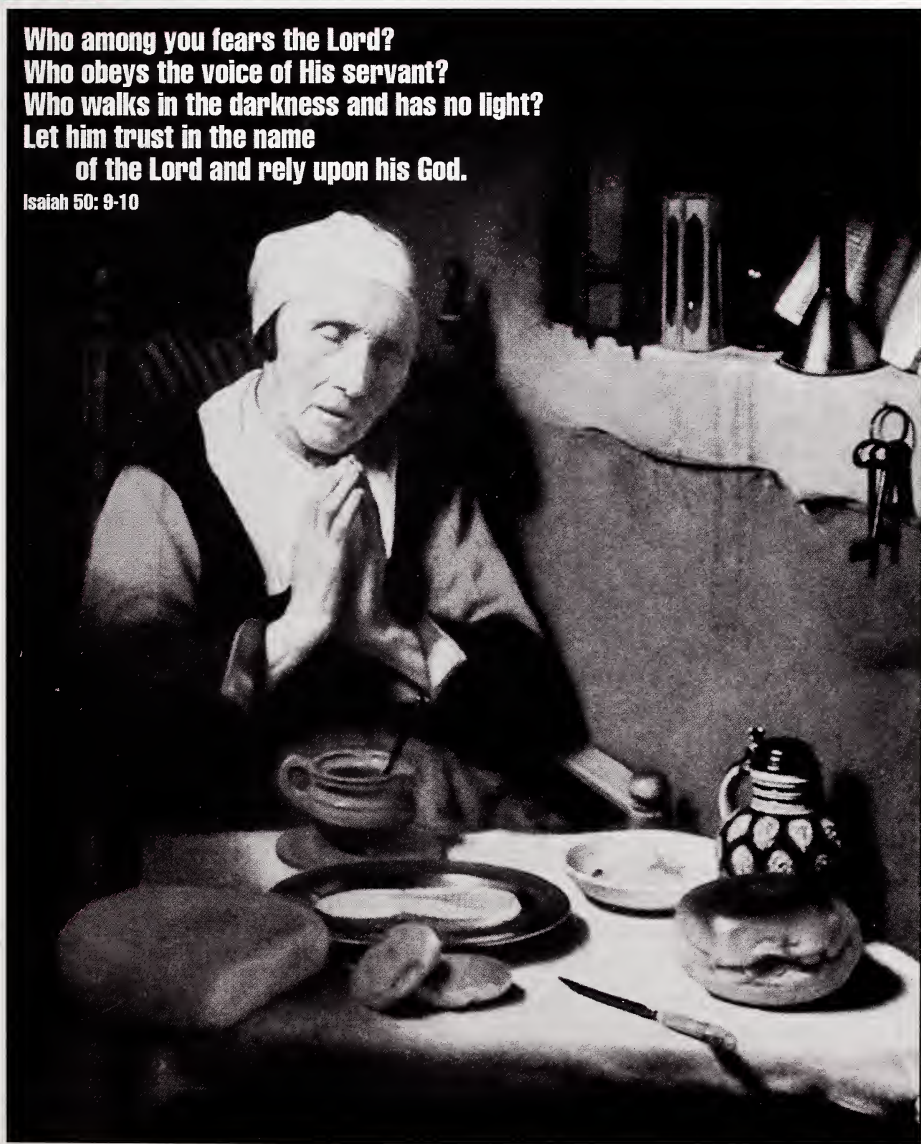
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Let him trust in the name
of the Lord and rely upon his God.**

Isaiah 50: 9-10



CAROLINA christian

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Shepherds or Lords

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heir attitudes were petty, ambitious, prideful, and worldly, prompting Jesus to say to them, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you;

but whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:25-26). The disciples' attitude toward authority was a worldly one;

"In His kingdom there is no place for lords. The kingdom already has one, and His name is Jesus."

that was the point of His rebuke. In contrast, He provided them with a radically different model based on servanthood. Kingdom leadership, according to Jesus, flies in the face of all worldly attitudes and models. In His kingdom there is no place for lords. The kingdom already has one, and His name is Jesus.

Yet, despite the clear teaching of our Lord, worldly attitudes in leadership still persist; and they persist to the point that there is a real leadership crisis in the church in America today. Elderships in congregations across the land are based more on a worldly corporate model than the biblical model of servant leadership. Elders meet behind closed doors devising their policies and decisions without the

Dennis Conner

input of the congregation. Edicts are then issued and

everyone is expected to comply. Too many times, when the congregation balks at following pronouncements that are not felt to be in the congregation's best interest, the response is an all too familiar, "We're the elders, and you're supposed to obey us." Many elderships are completely out of touch with the flock they are supposed to be shepherding. The sick are not visited (that's the preacher's job, after all), the struggling are not encouraged, the wayward are not pursued (it's easier to let them fall in the wilderness). And when the sheep rise up and demand shepherds, hackles are raised and necks stiffened. Threats are issued. More edicts are pronounced. The crisis? Too few servants in leadership and too many lords.

No less than the apostle Peter offered this exhortation to elders, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly, *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you* (emphasis mine), but being examples to the flock!" (1 Peter 5:2-3). Peter apparently had not forgotten Jesus' rebuke on that day many years earlier. He remembered that lording it over the flock is a worldly model based on worldly attitudes, the underlying attitude being that of pride. Still, lording persists to the detriment, and even destruction, of many congregations today.

In an article that first appeared in *Firm Foundation* on April 8, 1958,

brother J. W. Roberts, one of the most respected scholars of his day, boldly challenged, "What mean, then, some of the high-handed actions of some elderships? When an eldership says that it intends to do something 'even if the congregation doesn't like it,' it certainly is out of place. The only difference between this and popery is in the number of popes." He continues, "When an eldership or a part of an eldership contemplate an action and a large majority of the adult men ask a meeting with the elders to let the elders know that in the opinion of those members the action is wrong and should be reconsidered and the elders refuse to meet with them or to discuss the action, that is lording it over the church. No godly eldership would 'throw its weight around.' Recently it was said, 'Nobody can rule well who wants so much to rule.'" Earlier in the article Roberts stated, "Any time an eldership proceeds on the basis of an assumed 'authority' forging ahead without ascertaining what is the will of the assembly, it has departed from its scriptural function and has begun to act as 'great ones' lording it over the flock of God. It also is headed for trouble."

Paul had said in Titus 1:7 that a bishop (overseer) is not to be "self-willed." A self-willed man is one who insists on having things his way, regardless of the feelings of others and regardless of the greater good of the congregation. He is stubborn, prideful, headstrong and insensitive to the feelings of

others (and if one man can be this way, several can together). In contrast, the greater good of the congregation as a whole takes precedence over the personal agenda of the elder (or group of elders). Lords are self-willed, servants are not.

It is essential that elders remember that their function is not to control (or lord), but to equip (Ephesians 4:11-16). Specifically, to equip believers for works of service that build up the body of Christ. I have never known of a congregation that divided because it was being equipped by caring shepherds. On the other hand, I have known of congregations that were troubled, even divided, because elders demanded submission to their agenda (which translated means, "Our way or no way"). Those who refuse to submit to such leadership are usually judged as being disobedient, rebellious, and self-willed. It never occurs to the elders themselves that they may be guilty of "lording it over the flock."

If these words sound a bit harsh, I would remind you that I write as an elder; I write as one who has a vested interest in this subject. My prayer for my fellow-elders is that we remember that we are called to a ministry of service. If we ever find ourselves in danger of forgetting that, let us be reminded by Peter that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

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Church Conflict

If you asked someone from another religious group what they knew about the churches of Christ, what do you think would be their response? Randy Lowry reported in the December 1998 issue of the *Christian Chronicle* that he did just that. He asked a preacher of a Baptist church who was an acquaintance of Randy's what he knew about us. His response was that he knew us to be a Bible-believing people. However, the second thing he said he knew about us is not so flattering. The Baptist preacher said, "You people fight unlike any church I have ever known."

Randy Lowry serves as the director of the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, a program of Pepperdine University Law School. In the editorial I mentioned above, Dr. Lowry makes three observations that are worth passing along to anyone interested in our reputation of being a combative people.

First, conflicts (particularly in congregations) are rarely over doctrinal issues. That is strange since we have made doctrine such an important focus in our heritage. He states, "Most conflicts reflect the desire of people to have things their way." Most conflicts, he concludes, are thus personal and not doctrinal.

Second, most of the time when conflict arises, those "Bible-believing people" involved simply ignore clear biblical teachings about what to do (read Matthew 18, Colossians 3 and Philippians 2). The Bible is used to justify virtually everything

Ron Newberry

we do and every position we take in the church, but when conflict arises the clear, unambiguous instructions of God are set aside.

Third, when we ignore God's way of dealing with conflict and use our own destructive methods, God loses and Satan wins. Lowry writes, "...but frankly, it appears to me that all Satan has to do is to create a contentious spirit among us and the work of the Lord's church—in evangelism, in outreach, and in ministry—grinds to a halt."

One final observation from Dr. Lowry's editorial might be helpful. He reflects on John 17 and Jesus' final words to His disciples and His prayer for them. He notes that it's interesting that while Jesus might have prayed for their accurate understanding of Scripture, their correct analysis of the text, or their productivity in ministry, instead he prayed for unity among believers. That, my friends, is worth pondering as we strive to be Bible-believing people who are not just hearers of the word, but doers as well.

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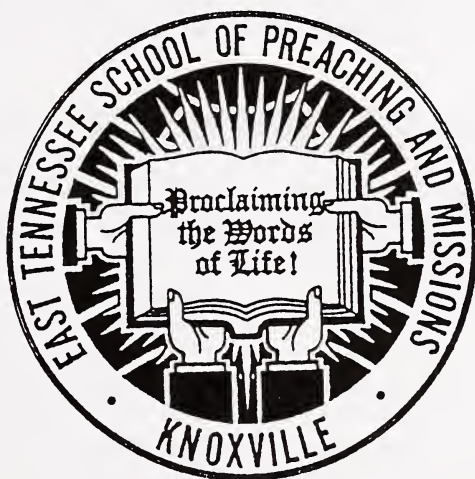
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Two Questions: Part Two

I like to think that good Biblical interpretation comes down to answering two questions about the text: “what” and “so what.” I have to admit this is somewhat misleading. Both of these questions are really overlapping collections of questions we need to ask. They provide a framework for the spiritual discipline of study.

While the questions overlap, we need them both. To ask “what” without considering the implications may provide good information about faith, but it does little to enhance faith. Likewise, to ask “so what” without searching for the text’s meaning becomes an arrogant or cynical dismissal of God’s word. God calls us to the hard work (the discipline) of asking both questions.

How do we read the letter to Colossians? What does Colossians have to say? What difference does it make to my life? As we work our way through these two questions, we have to keep in mind the fact that Colossians is a letter.

Think of how you read the letters you receive. I don’t mean junk mail (which I read only when I am bored), but real letters, however rare, from friends and loved ones. Do you take the time to correct the grammar or pull apart words and phrases for their exact meaning? Probably not. If you’re like me your focus on the intent of the message rather than the content of the words.

Stephen J. Walls Mathis

Letters, whether delivered by AOL, Juno or

the U.S. Postal Service, substitute for presence. We write when we can’t be there in person. We read and write longing for connection. Letters are special because, as we share our lives through the written word, we create a tangible blessing to hold on to.

The way we read personal letters should shape our reading of the New Testament epistles. As we study Colossians, we start with the obvious: it’s a letter, written by a specific author, written to a certain audience, written for a particular reason. In Colossians, guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul is searching for connection with his audience through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul’s aim is to share part of his faith experience, to pass on a word from the Lord, to point believers to the all-sufficient Christ.

Reading Colossians as a letter will help us keep the message in context. Take the time to read the whole letter in a single setting. Read it several times, in as many different versions as you can. Read it aloud, so you can listen to the rhythm and cadence of the letter. Keep your ears, and your heart, open to the message. Look at what Paul has to say in the context of the whole message, and the whole Gospel. After all, this word is for you.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16, NIV).

Burning Shame

The following article was taken from the India newsletter published by the Central Church of Christ in Cleburne, Texas. The newsletter is edited by missionaries Ron and Karen Clayton.

Randolph Gonce

and helpless. He began outreach into villages with the message of the cross, lifting up Jesus among the tribal people of that area. He had gone to Manoharpur for an evangelistic campaign and was sleeping in the station wagon outside the local church building when attacked by a mob of more than 100 people.

thoughtful people in India are burning with shame after the events of January 23, 1999.

Graham Staines and his two sons, Timothy and Phillip, were burned alive in Manoharpur village of Orissa's Keonjhar District early on that morning. A politically motivated mob blocked the doors of the ancient Willys station wagon in which they were sleeping, poured gasoline on the vehicle and shouted political slogans as the father and two sons were burned alive.

Reportedly the murderers were led by political activist Dara Singh, who belongs to a radical Hindu activist group called the Bajrang Dal, which is opposed to religious conversions. They fear that conversion to Christianity will change the political structure of India. Presently the high caste politicians have political and economic control and many of the members of the ruling party, the BJP, have been members of the Bajrang Dal. This radical group is responsible for encouraging persecution of Christians in India by espousing rhetoric that blames Christians for India's social and economic turmoil. They have repeatedly called for the expulsion of Christian missionaries from India.

Graham Staines cared the poor. He came from Australia in 1965 and became involved in the treating of lepers in Daripada, Orissa. He married his wife, Gladys, in the 1980's and together they became very involved in serving the poor

Gladys Staines and her daughter, Esther, are determined to continue the work. Gladys sang *Because He Lives* at the funeral for her husband and two sons. She announced her forgiveness of those who had murdered her family. Because of these events, Christ has been proclaimed from the front pages of many newspapers throughout India. In the face of persecution, many are coming to Jesus from families that have rejected the gospel for years.

The Christian community in India has been brought together by the tragic death of Graham Staines and his sons. Many marches and speeches have been organized in support of freedom of religion. Both secularists and Hindu nationalists are crying out against the intolerance that characterizes the radical movement.

The action of the radicals has increased the awareness of Christianity among the people and more are looking to see what there is to make a man expose himself and his family to danger, and what would lead someone to publicly announce forgiveness of people who had burned alive her beloved family. In a culture where people are used to selfishness, the light of forgiveness and care is shining brightly. The burning shame of religious intolerance and political fanaticism is being overcome by the love of Jesus.

Sad But True

a few weeks ago
I received, via

e-mail, the following sad commentary on our times. It was written by James Hicks, a technology education teacher in Colorado. I thought it was worth a read.

"The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less. We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness. We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life. We've added years to life, but not life to years. We've been all the

Peter Rode

way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing

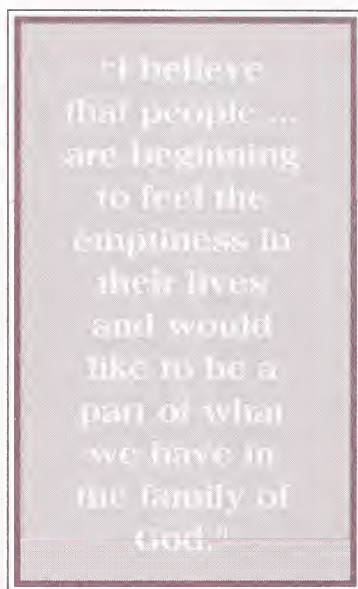
the street to meet the new neighbor.

We've conquered outer space, but not

inner space; we've done larger things, but not better things. We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we've split the atom, but not our prejudice. These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion; tall men and short character; steep profits and shallow relationships. These are the times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition. These are days of two incomes, but more divorce; of

fancier houses, but broken homes. These are the days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throwaway morality, one-night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer, to quiet, to kill. It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose to make a difference, or to just hit delete."

It seems to me that somehow we've lost our way. We have all the technologi-



cal know-how coupled with all the financial resources and other means to produce tremendous and startling breakthroughs in almost any field you wish to name. I feel blessed to live at a time when so much change and progress is taking place. I appreciate and take advantage of the technology at my disposal, but there's something terribly wrong when we've *not* progressed in fields most essential to life (and I don't mean in a physical sense). The "post-Christian" society and culture in which we live today has sought to emphasize the material, the temporary, the things which are unimportant when viewed from an eternal perspective. Paul once wrote, "...we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). We've ignored a relationship with God; in fact, we've chosen to leave God out of our lives! And we've neglected relationships with other human beings. Now we're paying the price. Relationships are the most important things in the world (cf. Matthew 22:37-40): first with God, and then with fellow human beings. If we don't have these, it doesn't matter how far we "progress" in other fields because we need God and we need each other to bring meaning to life. Instead of living out the philosophy of "He's my brother," (the Hollies), we live out the philosophy "I am a rock, I am an island; and a rock feels no pain and an island never cries" (Simon and Garfunkel). We've become too

isolated and uncaring. We live in worlds of our own and everyone does as he or she sees fit (cf. Judges 21:25).

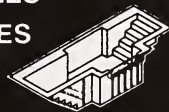
I'm glad that I'm in the church where, as a body, we look out for each other and where we deem the other as more important than ourselves. We defer to the body as a whole and we seek to develop relationships with God and with others because we're all family! This is a tremendous message that we have for the world. I believe that people, more than ever before, are beginning to feel the emptiness in their lives and would like to be a part of what we have in the family of God. It's time we leave the safety of our buildings and take this message of selflessness and community to those outside who are looking for love and life and meaning.

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

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A Modern Parable

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The parable begins with a farmer who owns a large field of grain. It is harvest time and the wheat is already golden brown and needs to be cut. It must not be left in the field very long because the wind or the rain may destroy the crop. Early in the morning the farmer goes into the small town and calls for helpers to come and help harvest his crop. The immediate response is favorable and many respond to his invitation.

When they arrive at the field they see the golden harvest and are deeply impressed. They talk about what a wonderful privilege it is to get to harvest so big and bountiful a crop. But someone points out that the fence around this field is not very attractive. It is an old rock fence and in many places the stones have tumbled down. So the people set to building a new fence. They spend all

Batsell Barrett Baxter

the morning getting stones from a nearby stream, which they use to build a beautiful wall around the field.

When the fence is finished, someone suggests, "Let's get to the work." Someone

else responds, "Wait, if the sun gets any hotter, or if it should rain, we will need shelter." They all agree, so over in the corner of the field they build a shelter for themselves. It is so beautifully done that they decide to put a plaque on it, with names inscribed, so that everybody who passes by in the generations to come will know just who was thoughtful enough to build such a wonderful shelter.

Then someone says,

"Now let's get to the harvest." But others say, "It is noon and we ought to eat first." So they work diligently until quite a feast is prepared. It is in keeping with the beautiful wall and the fine shelter and is a wonderful feast indeed.

After the dinner is finished, there is a period of rest, of course, and then someone says, "Now for the harvest." But someone else replies, "With such a great responsibility and with such a great challenge before us, do we not need to be better dressed than we are?" Immediately,

*Here is
a modern
parable which
is designed
to encourage
each of us
to want to
do more soul-
winning.*

each provides for himself better garments with which to do the harvesting. Then again they turn their thoughts to the golden grain and begin to sharpen the scythes with which to cut the grain. After a while they are razor sharp. But as they look at the grubby old handles they are not satisfied. They are unworthy instruments for so great a work. So the workers begin to carve those ugly handles into beautiful pieces, and some even add intricate filigree work of gold and silver. One man is even able to adorn his scythe with mother of pearl. It is a truly beautiful thing!

Now they are ready to go to the harvest.

But suddenly someone says, "It is night; the sun has gone down." It is then that they realize that only a few have cut any grain. So these wonderful people (like us) turn back sorrowing with guilty feelings to meet the man who owns the field. He comes to meet them, expecting shoulders laden with heavy bags of grain, but instead he finds only beautiful tools and a story of wonderful fences and fine clothes and a good dinner and a shelter to take care of those who work. He asks sadly, "But where is the harvest?" The people are speechless and ashamed.

From a lecture by Batsell Barrett Baxter.

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Charles Speer
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Parenting Today's Adolescent, A Good Read

allow me to inform you from the start, I am not a parent and do not claim to know what you go through as the parent of a teen. I am only a person who works with and loves teenagers and their parents and I often see the love and struggles that many Christian parents have as they raise teenagers. As someone who works closely with, listens to, and does what I can to compliment the efforts of Christian parents of teens, I offer the following words and book recommendation.

Randy Gore

way replace the parents or the family, the idea is

As a parent of a teenager or younger child, you have received a special, noble, and very important role — you are the steward of one or more of God's children. As you know, that is no job to be taken lightly or to be taken for granted. As you also know, it's a role where the wise will accept and encourage help from others: help from older parents (possibly your own parents) who have been through raising teens, help from other parents who are contemporarily going through the same joys and struggles, help from other adults such as ministers, coaches, teachers, etc. who are involved in the teen's life, help from your teen's peers who often know more about what is going on than anyone else, help from the teen him/herself, and most importantly help from God.

While the idea of "it takes a village to raise a child" has been misused and criticized, and "the village" should in no

basically good and wise parents know that many other people in their children's lives have good insight that parents need to listen to and even solicit. Many adults remember a time when anything a teen did that was "out of line" was already known by the parents before that teen even got home on a given evening because one of the parent's friends had already called and told them. In other words, the community was a network of parents and other concerned friends who looked out for one another's kids and parents helped each other and depended on each other's help, like a team. As we in modern society have become more and more independent from others (and often from God) this kind of help today is often discouraged as people are sometimes insecure in their own abilities, people are often not comfortable giving or receiving suggestions from one another, and can be insulted when help is offered or rejected. These attitudes should, of course, not exist with Christian parents and their peers in the church. When the healthy relationships exist that Christ desires amongst His people, these wrong attitudes are much less likely to exist. A huge step in having healthier relationships, which will in turn foster the growth of a loving network of helpers in the development of the church's Youth, is for all of us to realize and

accept truths such as this:

- None of us have all the answers (about your own child or anyone else's);
- All of us have problems and are not perfect (yes, we are all dysfunctional to a certain extent; let's admit it);
- We do need each other (God made us that way);
- None of us know everything about any one teen (whether it is your own or someone else's);
- No parent or other person has all the insight into what is going on in a teen's life;
- Everyone involved in a teen's life (both inside and outside the physical family)

- has various points of helpful insight;
- We are not in competition—we are on the same team; and
- If we all love the children and teens in the church (whether they are your own or someone else's) we can go a long way in helping them to develop into the spiritually minded and effective disciples that Jesus wants them to be.

While help is all around in the form of people we know, help can also come from good reading material, *especially* the Bible. There are many good sources with Christian ideals available to help parents and others who work with teens.

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Parenting Today's Adolescent by Dennis & Barbara Rainey is such a book. This is a great book to read and to keep as a resource to refer to several times as your children go through the pre-teen and teen years. The Rainey's write about three pivotal times: the Innocence Zone (age 10-12), the Danger Zone (age 13-16), and the Release Zone (age 17-19). Here is an excerpt from "the Danger Zone": "We believe this zone is the most dangerous phase of your child's life. The junior high and early high school years are when most families lose a son or daughter, although the actual loss of the child may not become evident until later. To this point your child and his friends have been essentially under the control of their families. Many parents assume, incorrectly, that the children their sons and daughters have relationships with at church, at school, and in the neighborhood have similar values to their own. This is a very, very dangerous assumption...With the onset of the teenage years, when children are experiencing greater freedom, the peers who once were a good influence may now be banding together to test the limits of their parents...For many young people, the junior high years become a fork in the road where they either continue down the right path or take the wrong one, testing things that are harmful...the problem is that choosing the wrong path is usually not a one-time decision or a huge event. It's a slow, slippery descent into compromising

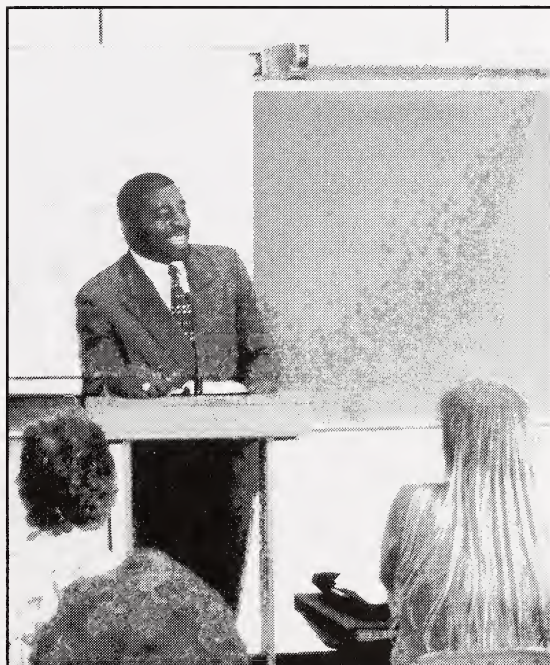
situations...the wise parent recognizes this danger zone and is careful to not give a child too much freedom too soon. Just because a child is beginning to look and act like an adult by making some 'right choices' does not mean he is really ready for adult responsibilities and corresponding freedoms," (Dennis & Barbara Rainey, *Parenting Today's Adolescent*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998; pp. 20-22).

Most of the book's focus is on its middle section (of three sections) which presents fourteen traps that often ensnare modern teens: peer pressure, sex, dating, attitude, media, unresolved anger, appearance, deceit, substance abuse, busyness (think about the demands on your teen from school and extracurricular activities-RG), the tongue, mediocrity, pornography, and false gods (which aren't typically in the form of a statue by the way-RG). This book is practical and is written by a couple who has experience from raising six children of their own and has worked with hundreds of other kids. It will surely be worth your time to read and refer to this book through the duration of your children's adolescence.

Randy Gore is a native South Carolinian and has served as Youth Minister with the Edgewood church in Columbus, Georgia the last four years. He can be reached at 4102 Macon Road, Columbus, GA 31907. Phone: (706) 568-8922. E-mail: RNGore@juno.com

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The Continuing Cross

Editor's Note: The following article originally appeared as a guest editorial in the October, 1966 issue of Carolina Christian. The author, Tom Bolick, is now retired after spending his entire preaching ministry in the Carolinas (including a 30 year ministry at the Shelby Church of Christ in Shelby, NC). I first met brother Bolick at Carolina Bible Camp; I was a fourteen year old camper and he was my counselor. In the years since brother Bolick has greatly influenced my own ministry. The one thing that I have always appreciated most about him is the fact that the grace of God manifested in the cross of Christ has always been at the center of his preaching and personal ministry.

Tom Bolick

"Faith, repentance and baptism must be directed toward Christ on the cross in order to be meaningful."

the theme of the cross is vital to all New Testament teaching. With the cross removed, the Bible becomes nothing more than a set of ethics or rules of moral behavior without a Savior. The Bible message is salvation from sin through the Savior, Jesus Christ. It is tragic that many have left this truth and made the cross of none effect.

Many Christians do not have a true concept of the cross and its power for living. Paul could not preach a sermon without the cross being central. To the Corinthians he declared, "For I deter-

mined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). He came to the heathen Corinthians with this foremost in his mind, and he remained there 18 months with this teaching still claiming his prime consideration. They had believed and been baptized (Acts 18:8), which is the natural response to the preaching of the cross.

To the Galatian Christians, Paul reminded, "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?" (Galatians 3:1). Notice the word "crucified" in this text and the same word in 1 Corinthians 2:2 above. In both cases they are perfect participles. That is, they show the act of crucifixion as continuing, not just one act performed in the distant past. Paul not only showed the sinner the act of Christ crucified in a single event, but then, upon conversion to Christ, showed him that Christ's death is of permanent significance. Christ continues to be the "lamb slain from the foundation of the world." His blood remains shed that the forgiveness of sin may continually obtained.

It is here that many teachers of the Word fail. Faith, repentance, and baptism must be directed toward Christ on the cross in order to be meaningful. After these primary responses, every act of worship and work still must relate to Christ crucified, having power now to elicit love and labor

for the Kingdom. To merely teach duty, without connecting obedience to Christ crucified for our sins, is to teach self-righteousness. Paul let the continuing cross of Christ work out his daily salvation: "But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, though which the world has been crucified to me, and I unto the world," (Galatians 5:14). Only the cross daily before Paul could keep his affections on Christ and the world crucified to him.

Recently, I read of a group of citizens who wanted a cross removed from a high hill that overlooked their city. They felt that it violated their rights. Indeed, this

is the very reason why Christ and His cross have always been rejected. Man must recognize his complete unworthiness and come in trust to the cross.

While picturing Christ crucified, we do not wish to leave the impression that He never overcame the cross. He did. It is said that many will carry a crucifix with a dead Jesus on it, rather than an empty cross with the victorious Christ enthroned in heaven and the heart. But, the permanent power of the blood shed on Calvary continues to save sinners and give joy to the saved.

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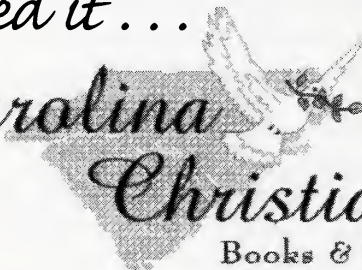


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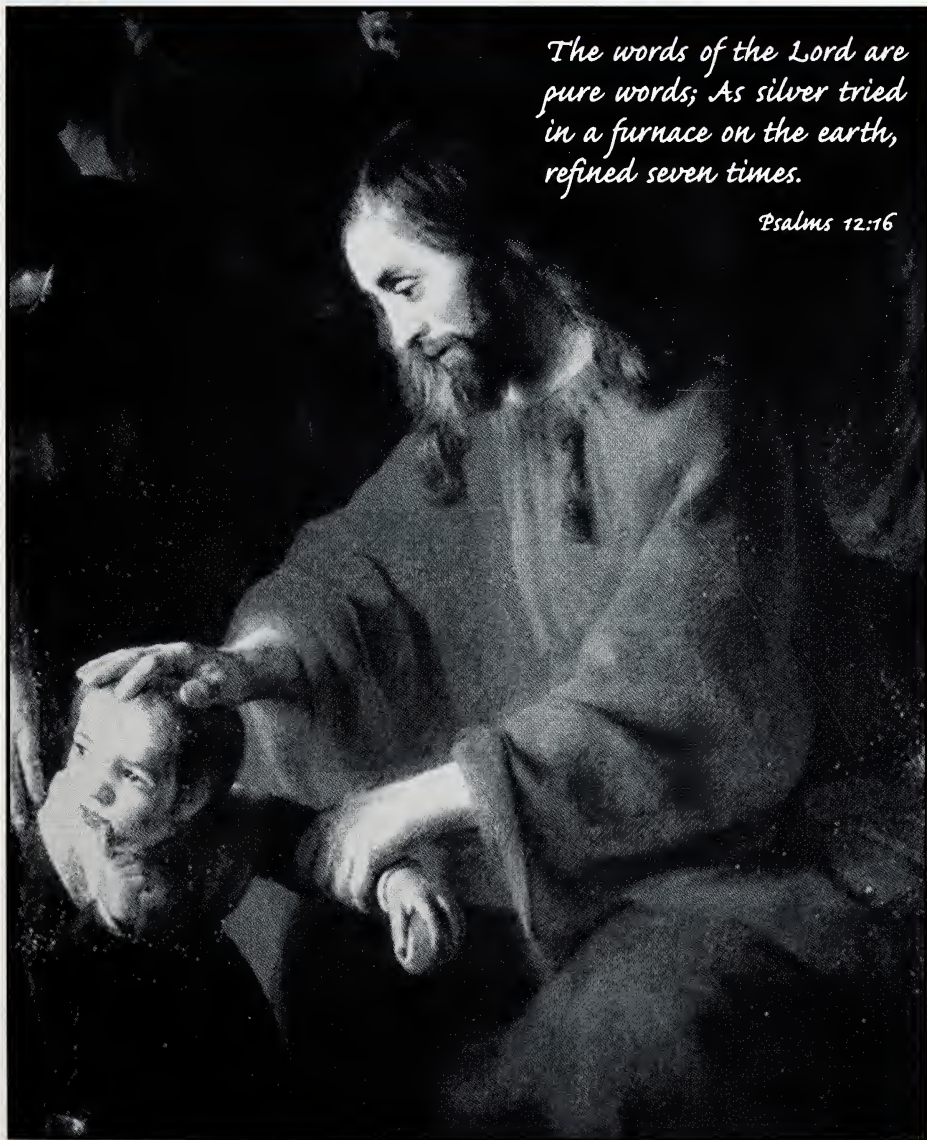
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*The words of the Lord are
pure words; As silver tried
in a furnace on the earth,
refined seven times.*

Psalms 12:16



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Deadly Illusions.....

While the church in

Dennis Conner

It would be a church without a heart for

Sardis had no doubt received many letters over the course of its congregational life, they had never received one like this. This letter was from Jesus. "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1b). I have no idea what the church expected to hear, but I seriously doubt it was this. When these words of stinging rebuke were read to the assembly, there must have been many who sat there in stunned disbelief and silence, self-righteous shock etched into their faces. Perhaps some even uttered a word of denial or protest, but there could be no disputing the eternal Christ. His words were sharp and unmistakably clear. *You're a dead church.*

How could this be? How could a seemingly dynamic and thriving church at the same time be permeated with the stench of death? Very simple. It had allowed activity to replace substance. And it still happens today. Happens all too often. There are far too many congregations today who labor under the deadly illusion that all is well; that they are thriving, productive and pleasing to God, when in reality they are little more than comatose bodies on life support.

How do we identify a church of the living dead? What characteristics should we look for if activity alone is not an accurate measure? We have no way of knowing exactly what went on in Sardis, but a church of the living dead today might look something like the following.

worship. This is not to say that such a church has no concern for worship. Quite the contrary. In fact, such churches may place a great deal of emphasis on worship, but it is a misplaced emphasis. Worship heart gives way to worship ritual. Worship heart gives way to worship ritual. A mere sense of duty replaces loving adoration as the compelling motive for worship. God is talked about, but not experienced. Worship assemblies likely are well attended, but those in attendance fail to be affected by the worship.

It would be a church where programs are more important than people. In such a church there would be no lack of programs that appeal to people. Not that programs are inherently bad and serve no legitimate purposes. It's just that many times we allow programs to serve as a substitute for real involvement in the lives of people. For instance, the poor come to our buildings and we spend a couple of hours handing them clothes or food. We've been busy for the Lord! And we feel good about that. But when was the last time we visited in the home of a poor person? Sat there and treated such a person as an equal while cockroaches scurried about our feet and the stench of filth violated our nostrils? Or how often do we rearrange our schedules to make time for someone who is hurting or confused and needs to talk? We can get involved in programs without actually getting involved in the lives of hurting,

sinful people. In such cases programs can actually serve to insulate us from people. They can give the illusion of active spirituality, when in reality they disguise our fear of involvement with people and

the demands of their messed up lives.



It would be a church that devotes more effort to gaining and maintaining respectability than

ministering like Jesus. It has become quite common these days to find churches advertising themselves with billboard campaigns. As you drive north on Highway 421 and cross the line into Yadkin County there is a billboard advertising the largest church in the county, boldly proclaiming, 'Making and Impact.' I've actually thought about such a campaign for our little church in Yadkinville. I envision a billboard just on the edge of town that says something like, "Looking For a Respectable Church? At the Yadkinville Church of Christ, WE'RE NOT IT!" This little band of disciples has a knack for loving and embracing the kinds of people that other churches would reject; you know, the kind of people Jesus loved while He was here.

In our culture, image has become everything. Even the average church facility is a masterpiece of architectural design: beautiful, accommodating, inviting. Beautiful buildings filled with beautiful people. Respectable people. Precisely the kinds of places with the

kinds of people that would make the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalized and the "wicked" sinners feel most unwelcome. Churches of the living dead are often filled with nice, respectable people and are easily scandalized by the "ungodly."

Many congregations work hard to create a great image to bolster their marketing strategy when they should be working harder to be conformed in ministry to the image of Christ.

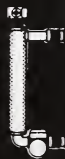
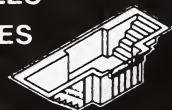
Well, much more could be said on this subject, but let's not dwell on the negative. While there are many churches among us that have succumbed to the illusion of activity over substance, there are many others that are vital and alive. Worship is vibrant and inspiring. They love and serve people; all kinds of people. Fellowship is deep and caring. Ministry is modeled after the life of Jesus and discipleship is shaped by His cross.

May this prayer be ours together, "Come, Lord Jesus, and shatter our illusions."

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The Fear and Worry Factor.....

We live in a time of unprecedented prosperity. The stock market is in record territory, inflation is almost nil and unemployment has hit record lows. Yet, the fear and worry factor streaks across every newspaper and every news broadcast on radio and television.

I suppose if we surveyed a cross-section of the American public we would find an unusual level of fear and worry. The Chinese have been stealing our nuclear weapon secrets. The President has somehow maintained a high approval rating for his job performance while at the same time maintaining incredibly low numbers for morals and ethics. Child abuse continues to be epidemic while we continue to abort a million and a half babies a year. Reorganization once meant moving the office furniture around; now it means the threat of layoffs at work. Drugs and weapons are pandemic in the schools. Road rage is evident on any given interstate highway at any time of day.

We have every right to be fearful, right? Maybe not. In *Scared to Life*, Douglas Rumford cites a study that explains why we shouldn't allow fear to rule our lives:

- 60% of our fears are totally unfounded;
- 20% are already behind us;
- 10% are so petty they don't make any difference;
- and 4-5% of the remaining 10% of our fears are real, but we can't do anything about them.

Ron Newberry

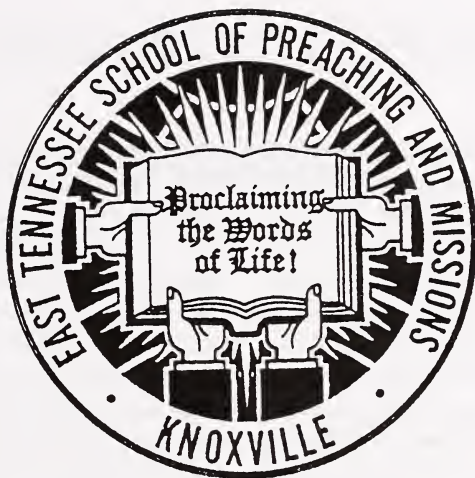
That means that 95% of the things we worry about are out of our control. Or put another way, only 5% are real fears that we can do something about.

Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Worries and aggravations should mold our prayers, and in the process of taking our concerns to God, don't overlook the admonition to bathe them in thanksgiving. Even in the midst of petitions to God to help us deal with obstacles and dilemmas, Paul says, "Don't forget to be thankful."

These words are not optional as far as Paul is concerned. He doesn't offer them as suggestions; he says, "Stop it! Stop worrying!"

How might this affect your view of life? How might that help you focus on solutions from God? How might that take your eyes off the problem and help you see the answer is always heavenward? I don't know how much it will help you, but you will never know until you do it.

Only 5% of our fears are valid fears that we can do something about. That's exciting in itself! Now add to that the fact that even with these real fears God is waiting for us to ask him to get involved in our lives. So why should we fret at all? Sure, we probably will anyway. But the point is that we don't have to. God is in control!



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Hurricane Floyd Disaster Relief.

Hurricane Floyd and the widespread destruction left by its flooding has been called the greatest natural and agricultural disaster in the history of our state. At this writing tens of thousands in eastern North Carolina are still homeless and thousands are living in shelters. The scope of the disaster was put in at least partial perspective by Carl Etchison, preacher for the Greenville Church of Christ. In an e-mail dated September 23, brother Etchison wrote, "We have had 32 inches of rain in the last two weeks (the yearly average is 34 inches)...Our water is now at 30 feet. The record high was 23 feet, set in 1919. They are now calling this a 500 year flood...This university town of 48,000 has 16,700 people displaced out of their homes. The death toll is at 40, and climbing. The schools are all closed indefinitely and are serving as shelters for over 2,000 people. Two of the seven shelters on the north side of town are surrounded by water and can only be reached by boat or helicopter...(People) exist one day at a time in a space on the floor. Many escaped only with what they were wearing. Many will not be able to return soon (if ever) to their homes. Members of the Greenville church were affected to various degrees. It has been reported that two families in the Westside congregation in Rocky Mount lost everything.

Response to the disaster has been swift. In addition to government and other national relief agencies (such as the

Red Cross), churches of Christ are also in the thick of the relief efforts. The Greenville church, a congregation of about 150, within days began using its building as a distribution center. The Churches of Christ Disaster Relief organization in Nashville, TN, sent numerous shipments of food. The church immediately began distributing boxes containing \$100 worth of food to needy families. Within the first few days over 400 boxes of food were distributed. The church also ordered 2,000 Bibles to be given away with the food.

Brother Etchison concluded his e-mail by writing, "We are determined to show our faith, hope and love. Our God is good, but we are few and the needs are great. The word is out that there is help available. They will find us here. We want to still help when the 2,000 people get put out of their shelters. How can we turn them away?...If we all work together, we have a chance to really make, not only a difference, but an impact...Can I tell them that Christians will care for them? Can I tell them help is coming?"

The Greenville church continues to take financial donations so that it can buy food and other necessities for the displaced people of the area. If you would like to contribute, send your donation to: Greenville Church of Christ, 1706 Greenville Blvd. SE, Greenville, NC 27858-4810. For more information you can call the church office at (252) 752-6376. May the heart of Jesus been seen through His church.

Where Is the Battle?

at around 10:00 or 11:00 in the evening, having just eaten the Passover and inaugurated the Lord's Supper with His apostles, Jesus led them to a familiar place. Crossing the Kidron Valley, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. So distressed was Jesus over what he was about to undergo that "in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:39-46).

The Lord's earthly life nearly withered there in the garden. He confessed to the disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Then He prayed, "Abba, Father," *abba* being the intimate Aramaic word for "father." Then He continued, "Everything is possible for You," praising God and reminding Himself of God's glory and ability to answer the prayer, "Take this cup from me." Jesus shared His request with the Father, but still submitted Himself to God's wisdom and care: "Yet not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:32-42). Falling on His face, Jesus prayed the same thing three times. Even though this was God's eternal plan, Jesus the man still struggled with it. God answered the prayer with "No." Yet, in that answer Jesus had received what He really wanted: He desired the Father's presence more than His presents.

The writer of Hebrews noted that "during the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with

Danny Boggs

loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him

from death, and he was heard because of His reverent submission" (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus battled agonizingly when He prayed. The real battle for Jesus did not take place in Pilate's hall, or even on the cross or in the tomb. It was fought in the garden and the weapon was prayer. Jesus won the battle when in prayer He defeated every selfish desire. He had already won when He climbed Golgotha!

Satan is no greater enemy to us than we are to ourselves. Selfishness is always with us. We battle it when we pray and the goal is to give our wills over to God. Then we are ready when Satan does confront us. It was in this way that Jesus prayed and He has taught us to do the same (Matthew 6:10). We can know that God will answer our true desires when we pray according to His will (1 John 5:14-15).

Prayer is a real struggle, but we do not have to struggle alone. "In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27). Pray hard! God is on our side. In prayer He helps us to win the battle!

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville, NC. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

Remembrances of Summer Camp

David Kneip

meetings in Christ!

I know that

many of you found your way this summer to a church-related camp of some kind. I was able to spend two weeks of my summer at a church camp in the Carolinas, and I've been thinking a lot about that time since then. If you will, allow me to share my memories, my feelings, and my convictions from camp this summer. I hope that you will see yourself in these thoughts, and I hope to challenge you a little bit.

I was reminded this summer of the importance of Bible study in my own daily life. We spent a great deal of time in the word: in classes, in camp devotionals, in cabin devos, and in worship times. I loved it. Unfortunately, that doesn't always reflect my "normal" life. Maybe you have felt the same things I have: that studying or reading the Bible every day is pretty tough. It's tough sometimes just to read once a week. And when we do read, it's not always profitable, unfortunately. We do it because our parents make us (not a bad reason, but not the best one), or we do it out of a sense of guilt.

I firmly believe that God works in us even when we don't want him to or think he can't. The reading and study of God's written word is an absolutely essential part of our relationship with him. Reading the Gospels and seeing Jesus moving among the people of his day reminds us of who our brother and savior is and gives us a perfect example to follow. Spending time in the Psalms helps us see that prayers are Carolina Christian

not always nice and neat.

When we feel strong

emotions, God wants to know! And God can help. The New Testament Letters are indispensable reading for learning how we should treat one another in the church and in the world. The Old Testament gives us the background, the foundation, upon which Jesus' life, the church, and the New Testament were built. It immerses us in the story of our forefathers, the nation Israel, in all of its successes and failures, its closeness to and distance from God.

Something else I learned this summer was the value that camp holds for those of you from smaller churches. I grew up in a small church. My youth group was me, my brother, our friend from up the street, and a couple of other kids. I had forgotten how much it meant to go to camp and see 200 other kids who love the same songs and want to know Jesus. Lots of you don't have large youth groups. You don't have youth ministers. You might feel pretty shortchanged when you meet people from big churches with mega-youth groups. Don't despair, though. God has so much work for you to do, but he has also provided you with a wonderful place to be encouraged, taught, and built up for that work. And camp is that place.

Here's something else I learned: we as Christians are not that different from the rest of the world. I wish it was not true, but it is. We judge people by the way they look and the way they act. We spent

a lot of time this summer getting our hair fixed just right, picking out the Abercrombie shirt for the day, and choosing which colognes or perfumes to bring and which to leave home. We shunned certain people at camp because they didn't dress right or they looked funny. We ignored the kids who were hanging around by themselves because we were worried about how it would look to our friends.

My prayer for all of us is that God will fill us, like Jesus, with compassion for hurting people all around us. That God will transform us into a people that doesn't choose clothes based on the name brands or friends because of how they

look. That we could make it through a week of camp without once looking in the mirror because we know that our beauty and glory come from being children of God and that none of our friends will judge us based on our looks. That we will be able to put aside our preoccupations with our bodies, looking forward to the day when we will be given new ones with the name of our Father on our foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

I'm looking forward to next summer, friends. God bless you all.

David Kneip formerly served the Cole Mill Rd. church in Durham, NC, as a minister to its youth. He is now pursuing a graduate degree at Abilene Christian University.

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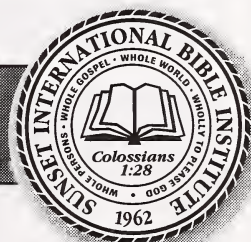
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Hollis Maynard



The Impartiality of God

a few years ago,
while living in

Paul Jarrett

Charlotte, I saw something at the mall that made me angry. I saw an older couple pushing the wheelchair of their adult son who had obviously been crippled from birth. I had seen similar sights before without feeling such emotion. Perhaps it was the contrast of seeing this one family in the midst of so many other obviously healthy, prosperous families.

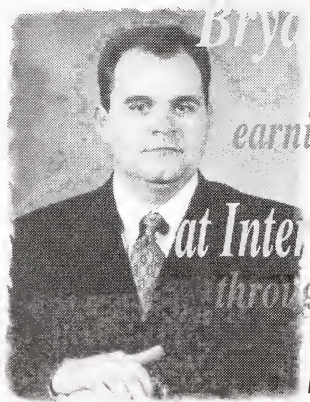
Let me explain my anger. My first thought was one of understanding. I understood for that moment why some people become angry with God for

allowing such tragedies as birth defects to strike some

families so indiscriminately. It is easy to refute the "problem of evil" when engages in a neat theological discussion. However, it is more difficult when you experience the emotions that you feel when you personally witness an illustration of this problem. However, as I thought about what I was feeling, my anger moved away from God (who is really not the cause of such evil) to what I believe should be the true focus of our anger.

First, I was angry at sin and the havoc it has wreaked on mankind. I

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know that God does not hold anyone personally accountable for another's sins, but what I saw in the mall made me painfully aware of the consequences that result from living in a sin-scarred world. It made me long for the day when we can live in a better world where sin and its fruit will be no more.

Second, my anger ultimately came to rest on myself for my own ingratitude and the complaints I'm far too inclined to make when faced with minor discomforts. I have been spared so much of the "rain" that falls without partiality on others who are no worse sinners than me. I have been the

recipient of so much of the "sunshine" that indiscriminately bathes others who are far more righteous than me. With those thoughts in mind, I could no longer feel anger, but only gratitude towards the Father who is in heaven: "For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

Paul Jarrett may be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102. He can also be contacted by e-mail at: pejarrett2@juno.com.



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In Search of Renewal: Part 7

A Passionate People

“Hear, O Israel: *The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Phil Stapp

ning God has sought loving responses from men and

women to his loving actions.

As we come to the end of this series, it is important that we end as we began, with love. Love is the beginning of spiritual renewal and its ultimate end. As with Israel, it is because the LORD loves us that he has chosen to save us through his son, Jesus. It is to this loving act of God that we respond in love. This love, then, is to permeate our lives, leading us to complete obedience and empowering us to love others as ourselves. Listen to the words of John:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:7-12)

“In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him” (1 John 4:17).

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Moses reminded the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan River into the promised land of the essence of their relationship with God. He told them:

“The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deuteronomy 7:7-9).

It is somewhat surprising to have the old covenant described as a covenant of love. Christians tend to think only of the new covenant in this way. Yet love has always been the essence of a covenant relationship with God. From the begin-

"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God, — yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:19-21).

**Love is the
beginning
of spiritual
renewal
and its end.**

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

This is love for

God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:1-5).

Loving God with our entire being is to be the essence of our relationship with him. Love leads us to obedience and to the service of others. The love of Christ does not seek self interests, power, or to manipulate and control. It seeks to show the love of God to others so that they will be encouraged to respond to his love in obedience and service.

Love is the beginning and the end of our spiritual transformation in Christ. Without love we become like the Pharisees who looked good on the outside but were empty on the inside (see Matthew 23). Without love, pseudo communities may exist that look good and perform many services but they are not the true church of Christ. A group of people may come together in the name of Christ and imitate every aspect of worship, church structure and ministry with great accuracy, but without love it means nothing (see 1 Corinthians 13). To be the people of God we must be a passionate people.

The fellowship of love in Christ is not something we can imitate or even "restore." It is rather something created by God in Christ in which we may participate. As we participate, we are renewed. As we are renewed, we (to return to our original definition) escape self and become absorbed in the love of God and others. May it be our goal to allow the transforming of God to totally consume us.

Phil Stapp serves the Brewer Rd. church in Winston-Salem, NC. He can be contacted at 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27127, or by e-mail at: pstapp1@prodigy.net.

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Two Questions: Part Three

Maybe it's just me, **Stephen J. Walls Mathis** We've already said (and it's obvious from the first

but have you ever noticed that there are some things in the Bible that are difficult to understand? How many times have you avoided reading Revelation because of the Stephen King like scenarios? How many times have you started to read the Bible through from cover to cover only get bogged down in Leviticus? As we practice the spiritual discipline of Bible study we encounter again and again distance between us and the text. It's a distance of time, culture and language. We do our best to cross this gap, to understand what the text meant and wrestle with what it means. Fortunately, we're not alone in our pursuit? God is with us. We know from the start that there are things Paul writes in Colossians we may never figure out this side of heaven. Yet we trust the Lord to lead us in our search, to challenge us with His word, and to speak to our life of faith. All of this is done as we consider Colossians in its context.

To understand the context, we should look at four things:

1. Who is the author?
2. Who are the recipients?
3. Why was the letter written?
4. How should we read the letter?

We'll consider the first two in this article, and 3 and 4 in the next.

Carolina Christian

verse) that the Apostle Paul is the author, along with his companion Timothy. Paul's life has been radically changed by Jesus Christ. Once a persecutor of Christians, he is now the apostle to the Gentiles, his life caught up in the amazing grace of God Almighty.

Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome, where he knows his life is at stake. Yet it is the Gospel of Christ, not "all-mighty" Rome, that makes Paul a prisoner. There is nothing Rome can do to shake his identity or his faith. Paul pays little attention to his physical imprisonment, choosing to focus on the chains that bind him to God and bind him to other Christians.

Which brings us to question two. Who are the recipients? Well, there's more than one answer to that question. First of all, the letter is written to the church at Colosse. This is a congregation (or perhaps a set of congregations) Paul has never met, in a small, relatively insignificant town in Asia Minor. It's a Gentile church, made up of young and old, slaves and masters, established by a "man of prayer" named Epaphras. It is through Epaphras that Paul learns of Colosse.

But Paul has other churches in mind. "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea"

(Colossians 4:16 NIV).

This is a circular letter of sorts. Paul wanted the Colossians to exchange letters with the Laodiceans. And beyond the churches of his day, Paul had us in mind as well.

Did Paul know nearly twenty centuries would pass before we were to read his words? Probably not. And yet, through the work of the Holy Spirit, through the transforming grace present in his life, Paul writes to all Christians. He writes to us, here and now, about the mystery of Christ, which has laid claim to our lives.

Hard to understand? Yes, indeed. Yet it is this unfathomable mystery which makes any true understanding possible. "The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27, NIV).

*Stephen J. Walls-Mathis may be contacted at
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Meditating on the Goodness and Love of God.....

Nothing is more powerful to

engage our affection than to find that we are beloved. Expressions of kindness are always pleasing and acceptable to us, though the person should be otherwise mean and contemptible; but, to have the love of One who is altogether lovely, to know that the glorious Majesty of heaven has any regard unto us, how must this astonish and delight us, how must it overcome our spirits and melt our hearts, and put our whole soul into a flame!

Now, as the Word of God is full of the expressions of his love toward man, so all his works do loudly proclaim it: he gave us our being, and, by preserving us in it, does renew the donation every moment. But, lest we should think these testimonies of his kindness less considerable, because they are the easy issues of his omnipotent power, and do not put him to any trouble or pain, he has taken a more wonderful method to endear himself to us; he has testified his affection to us by suffering as well as by doing; and because he would not suffer in his own nature, he assumed ours. The eternal Son of God did clothe himself with the infirmities of our flesh and left the company of those innocent and blessed spirits, who knew well how to love and adore him, that he might dwell among men and wrestle with the

Henry Scougal

*"But oh! That last,
that dismal scene!
Is it possible to
remember it and
question his kindness,
or deny him ours?"*

obstinacy of that rebellious race to reduce them to their allegiance and felicity, and then to offer himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for them.

The account which we have of our Savior's life in the gospel does all along present us with the story of his love; all the pains that he took and troubles that he endured were wonderful effects, and uncontrollable evidences of it. But oh! That

last, that dismal scene! Is it possible to remember it and question his kindness, or deny him ours? Here, here it is, my dear friend, that we should fix our most serious and solemn thoughts, "That Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

I remember that one of the poets has an ingenious fancy to express the passion wherewith he found himself overcome after long resistance; that the God of love had shot all his golden arrows at him, but could not pierce his heart, till at length God put himself into the bow, and darted himself straight into his breast!

Henry Scougal was born in 1650 and died in 1678.

DUNCAN, SC...

Southeastern Christian Children's Home broke ground for the new Family Service Center on August 21. The new facility, which will house administrative and child-care offices, will be devoted principally to offer a broad range of family and community services including family training and therapy. The annual dinner is scheduled for October 23 at the Carolina Country Club in Spartanburg. Dr. Milton Sewell, President of Freed-Hardeman University will be the guest speaker.

KINGSTREE, SC... *Billy McVey*, minister for the Kingstree church of Christ, and the Central Carolina School of preaching are organizing a mission trip to Honduras during the first two weeks of December. Additional volunteers are needed, especially those who can speak Spanish. The cost of the trip is estimated about one thousand

dollars. Participants will need a valid passport and certain shots prior to the trip. For information please call Billy McVey at 843-382-5824 or 843-354-5362.

MARIETTA, SC...

Palmetto Bible Camp hosted its annual open house and fall singing on October 9. Dan Knight, Chairman of the PBC Board of Directors reported on the 1999 camping season. About 800 campers attended six weeks of the regular session. Fifty-four were baptized and many campers and staff asked for prayer.

MOCKSVILLE, NC...

Food Lion Shopping Days for Carolina Bible Camp will be November 15, 16, & 17, 1999. Five percent of purchases made at any Food Lion with a special camp voucher will benefit CBC. For information contact Judy Swicegood at 336-751-2478, JudySwice@AOL.com, or at 1662 Jericho Church Road, Mocksville, NC 27028.

ROCKHILL, SC... The second annual Carolina Men's Fellowship will be hosted by the Charlotte Avenue church of Christ in Rock Hill on Saturday, March 11, 2000.

For information please call 803-327-7853.

WILMINGTON, NC...

The *Pine Valley Church of Christ* will host the MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT SEMINAR on April 14 & 15, 2000. This ten hour seminar is designed to enrich, strengthen and vitalize good marriages. It will be conducted by Dr. Paul Faulkner and Dr. Carl Breechen. For information contact Al Dunkleman at 910-791-2255.

SENECA, SC... The *Seneca Church of Christ* will be hosting a special seminar for elders, deacons and preachers November 12-14, 1999. The guest speaker will be Mac Layton of Edmond, OK. For more information, or to register, contact the church office at 10833 Clemson Blvd., Seneca, SC 29678.

CHARLOTTE, NC...

The *Sugar Creek church* will be hosting the North Carolina State Lectureship November 13-17, 1999. The theme will be "What Say Ye?" For more information you can contact the church office by phone at (704) 598-8984, or by e-mail at: sccoc@hotmail.com.

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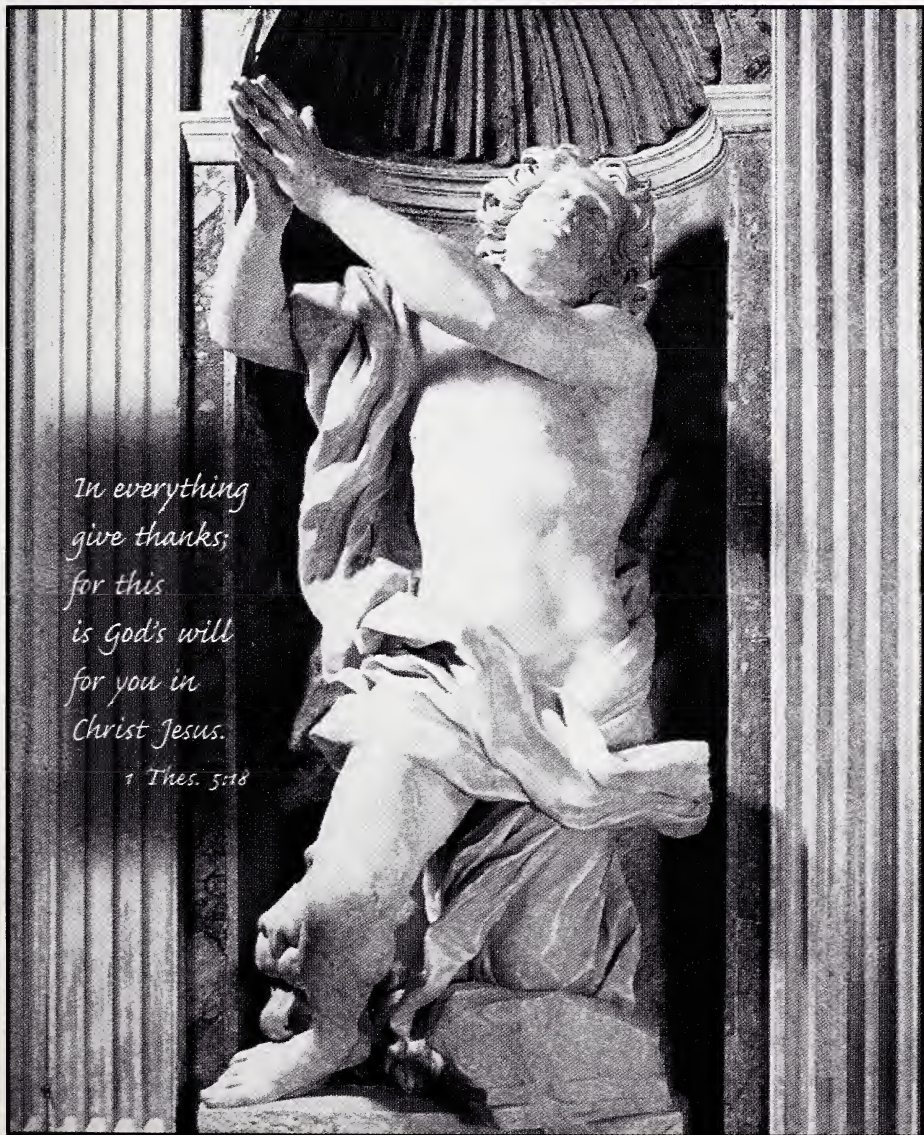
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*In everything
give thanks;
for this
is God's will
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1 Thes. 5:18



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Thanksgiving and Forgetfulness.

Psalm 106 opens with the exultant shout, "Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting." In this season of thanksgiving when our nation pauses to remember its history and heritage, and to offer the appropriate thanks, this particular psalm seems more than fitting for the occasion and the times. It serves as a graphic reminder of the tendency toward and consequences of forgetfulness.

The call to render praise and offer thanks for the infinite and marvelous deeds of our great God is always appropriate for His people and for any nation. However, what I find most fitting about Psalm 106 lies in the verses that comprise the remainder of the psalm. What is found there is a prolonged and scathing rebuke of forgetfulness.

Time and again the psalmist recalls specific rebellious acts of Israel following her deliverance from Egypt by the powerful hand of God. The poet acknowledges that "Our fathers did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember Your abundant kindnesses" (v. 6). Then follows a litany of Israel's rebellious deeds that form a pattern of forgetfulness: they rebelled at the sea; they did not wait for His counsel and tempted Him in the desert; they made a calf at Horeb and worshiped a molten

Dennis Conner

image, thus exchanging the glory of God for the

image of an ox that eats grass; they grumbled against God and were never satisfied with His provisions; they joined themselves to the idol Baal-peor and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; at the waters of Meribah the people continued

their grumbling ways and provoked the Lord there; later they mingled with the nations and took up their idolatrous practices, sacrificing even their own children to the demons.

The common sinful thread binding all of these

rebellious acts together? *Forgetfulness.*

Twice the psalmist says, "They forgot" God and His works (vv. 13, 21).

Forgetfulness is but the unspoken language of ugly ingratitude. It is a willful attitude rooted in self that undermines any appreciation for God's acts of gracious lovingkindness. It takes the kindness of God for granted, as if it were something owed to us. Forgetfulness of the kindnesses of God in reality is little more than the idolatry of self. We forget Him because we are so full of ourselves, and then there is nothing left for God to do but to humble the self-exaltation of His people. He did then, and He will now.

The antidote for forgetfulness is found in the opening stanza of the psalm: *praise.* Praise focuses our attention outwardly on the Lord and His deeds instead of inwardly on us and our needs. God—



centered praise then inevitably leads to thankfulness.

When Thanksgiving Thursday arrives this year, perhaps we should first set aside a time for praise, focusing on the gracious deeds of the Father. Although we Christians are supposed to be far more adept at the giving of thanks than our secular neighbors, there are still far too many trite and thoughtless expressions of thanks that escape our lips. And if that is the kind of thanks we offer up on a day set aside for it, then what must all our other days be like?

Let us not forget the unrelenting

kindness, grace and compassion of our Father. Rather, let our prayer on this Thanksgiving day — and every day — be that of the inspired poet:

“Save us, O LORD our God,
And gather us from among
the nations,
To give thanks to thy holy name,
And glory in Thy praise.
Blessed be the LORD, the God
of Israel,
From everlasting to everlasting,
And let all the people say, ‘Amen.’
Praise the LORD!”

(Psalm 106:47-48)

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Urgent Need!

Truth Sometimes Hurts.

In his book, *Strengthening Your Grip*, Charles

Ron Newberry

Swindoll tells the story of a trip taken a few years ago that included a two-and-a-half hour layover in the Denver airport. If you have ever had one of those long layovers, then you know how minutes seem to stretch into hours.

Swindoll noted that the delay was bad enough, but what made matters worse was a small child loose in the airport.

"Loose" seems to be the appropriate word. Swindoll said that she was uncontrollable. Her mother was the preoccupied, don't-bother-me type who cajoled, bargained, threatened, and who always eventually gave in. Even though the child was quite young, she was very good at the game. Obviously she had played the game before and I gather from his description she must have been undefeated.

The child dumped at least four ashtrays all over the floor. (This was back when smoking was permitted in airports). The creature crawled over every seat (both occupied and unoccupied) screamed for something to drink or eat or both until she got them. The little beast grabbed newspapers out of men's hands as they were reading them. She then committed the unpardonable sin; she stepped on Swindoll's shoes.

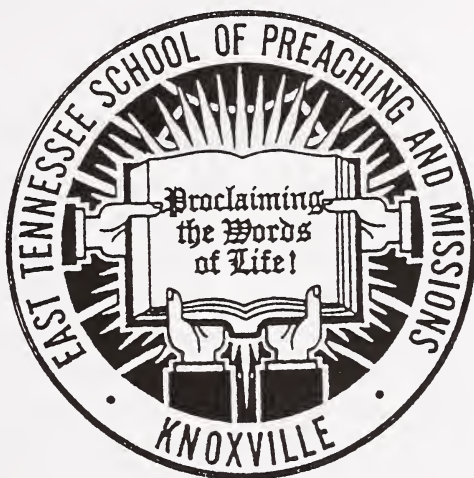
He explained that you have to understand that his shoes are his pride and joy. No one ever touches them. They are spit-shined, placed in shoetrees each night and protected in the closet as well as the suitcase during travel by covering them with socks. His first reaction when she walked on his

shoes was not to say, "That's ok, I'll touch it up later." No, his first reaction was to punch this preschooler's lights out.

Finally after what seemed like days of torture when no one could stand it any longer, the mother was given some loud and direct counsel. Her reaction was somewhat predictable. She was deeply offended. The very idea that someone would think that her little monster...er, darling was out of control was just too much. She was defensive in spite of the fact that she was surrounded by dumped-over ashtrays, various pieces of liter from junk food wrappers and empty drink containers, angry businessmen and women and one enraged minister with scuffed shoes. She actually referred to them as rude when someone (I suspect Swindoll) firmly stated, "Get control of your child!"

Sometimes it's difficult to hear the truth. Sometimes we even may get defensive. But truth cannot harm us. In fact, the truth sets us free. That's Jesus' conclusion concerning the Jews who had come to believe in him in John 8:31, 32. Allowing his truths to live in them would set them free.

Listening to truth affords us the opportunity to break free of the slavery of sin and self-delusion. Yet, James warns us that just hearing truth is not enough. He says in James 1:22-25 that one is blessed when he does what the truth instructs him to do. Sure it can be painful at times. However, the results will more than make up for the pain.



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God Deserves Our Applause

raise the Lord!

For too many,

Tim Kraus

a message our culture — a culture that has lost any

that wonderful expression of adoration has become nothing but trite religious patter. But no one who has read Psalms 146 to 150 can regard it as such. You may have noticed that most translations give the phrase as, “Praise the LORD,” with God’s name in all capitals. It indicates that the distinctive name of Israel’s God, YHWH (sometimes appearing in our English translations as *Jehovah*), is being used instead of the more generic ADONI. Not only is the Psalmist saying, “*Praise God*,” but he is also emphasizing that all praise belongs to the *true* God. Only Jehovah, not the idols, should be praised.

Why should God be praised?

Because He “upholds the cause of the oppressed...sets prisoners free...gives sight to the blind...sustains the fatherless and the widow...(and) reigns forever” (Psalm 146).

Because the LORD “determines the number of the stars...covers the sky with clouds...supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills” (Psalm 147).

Because “his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens” (Psalm 148).

To sum it up, God’s mercy, absolute power and sole position of deity in the universe *demand* that He be praised! That’s

sense of the transcendent — desperately needs to hear.

Oh, we know what it is to give praise; that’s not the problem. Just watch the fans at a rock or country concert. Whistles, cheers and applause are all ways of expressing adoration. Attend virtually any sporting event, whether it be high school, college or pro. Watch and listen when the home team does well. A pandemonium of praise! Yes, we know how to praise human accomplishment.

But how often do we applaud God?

When we are moved by an act of compassion, we should praise God, who wrote the book on mercy! When a diamond-studded night sky or spring hillside of verdant green takes our breath away, we ought to pause and thank the God who made it all.

When we realize that God is the Lord and that our greatest accomplishments pale in comparison to His dazzling miracles, we need to be humbled before His power and majesty. And we need to tell Him how much we adore Him!

Want to develop a heart that is both humble and courageous, and a life that reflects goodness? Then learn to *praise the LORD*.

Tim Kraus lives in Conneaut, OH. He has been preaching for the church there since 1977.

.....Two Questions: Part Four

as we move on in our search for the “what” and the “so what” of Colossians we seek first to understand the context of the letter. In the last article we noted four contextual questions:

1. Who is the author?
2. Who are the recipients?
3. Why was the letter written?
4. How should we read the letter?

We’ve seen that Paul, the apostle in chains, is the author, writing from prison with a grace-filled pen. The recipients span the ages — residents of a small, first-century Roman colony as well as twenty-first century congregations throughout the world.

So why was this letter written? Paul has a clear purpose in mind as the Spirit guides him to write. He’s concerned for these Christians he has never met. First, Paul speaks a word of encouragement, to remind us — the Colossians, the Laodceans, as well as modern day Carolinians and Virginians — that Christ Jesus is supreme in all things. We already have everything we need in Him and through Him. Paul even includes an early Christian hymn, Colossians 1:15-20, to remind them and to remind us of what we already know: Christ is enough.

Second, Paul writes a word of warning. “Don’t let anyone take away what you have. Don’t let anything or anyone stand

between you and the Lord God Almighty.”

Why does Paul warn us about falling away from faith? Because he knows what you and I have learned through experience: the closer you get to deciding to do the right thing, the harder it will be. Paul knows that the world is hostile to faith, and he knows that sincere faith takes work and daily decisions while various counterfeit faiths offer a better or easier way.

Why should we listen to this warning here and now? Because the danger persists, inside churches as well as outside. For nearly two thousand years people have had the audacity to say “Jesus Christ is the only way, but our way is better.”

You’ve heard the audacious lies, haven’t you?

“Yes, you should love your brothers and sisters the way Christ loves you, but you don’t have to be involved in their lives outside of the church building.”

“Yes, your faith in Christ should be active. But don’t let it get in the way of how you do your job or how you treat your family.”

“Yes, you can read the Bible for yourself and seek to understand it. But you’ll have to make sure your interpretation matches up with mine.”

“Yes, faith in Christ is enough. But to get to Christ you have to go through us.”

With the full force of the Spirit of God, Paul shouts “Enough! Enough! Don’t listen

to the lies. Don't buy into that counterfeit faith? Hold on to Him and only Him."

Christ — and only Christ — is enough. Don't let anyone tell you differently. Don't settle for anything less.

One more question for now: How do we read this letter?

We need to read Colossians as if God is speaking directly to us. Whether we listen or not, that is exactly what He is trying to do. We have to move beyond defining words and toying with ideas to

hearing the voice of God. As the Spirit moves from the page into our daily lives we will be caught up in the supremacy of Christ. For it is in Christ that we live and move and have our being.

Christ is enough.

*Stephen J. Walls-Mathis may be contacted at
P.O. Box 6212, Charlottesville, VA 22902.*

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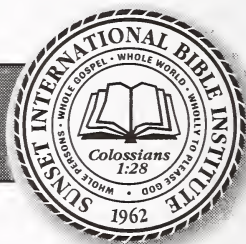
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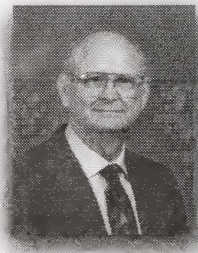
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Hollis Maynard



.....He Too Is a Man

He had said something that morning that hurt her. It wasn't the first time, and she knew it wouldn't be the last. Sometimes he apologized immediately, but usually he would say, "I'm sorry" eventually. And then sometimes he didn't apologize at all. Those were the occasions when he was fully convinced that he was right and she was the one who should apologize. Sometimes he was right, and she did.

Whatever form the resolution of this morning's conflict would take, the hurt was with her now. It would not go away before the man she had had words with would stand before her to proclaim God's word. How could she listen to God's message coming from the same mouth which had said so many hurtful things earlier?

The dilemma she faced was one with which she had found it necessary to come to terms as a preacher's wife. She knows better than anyone in the audience that the man who stands before them all each Sunday is just that, a man. She is with him daily. She has seen him at his worst and she knows his faults. She has felt the pain his weaknesses can inflict on others. She has had to learn to focus on God's message as it is brought to her in an earthen vessel. How does she do it?

First, she recognizes the fact that her husband is no different than herself, or any other person. It would be unreason-

Paul Jarrett

able to expect him to be without fault. Perhaps it would be more difficult for her to listen to him proclaim the things of God if he claimed to be something he is not. However, she has never heard him claim to be perfect. He knows he is just a man and that makes it easier for her to accept him with his imperfections. She knows she would fare no better if perfection were expected of her.

Second, she understands clearly why she is in the assembly. She is not there to fall at the feet in worship of this imperfect man who happens to be her husband. He doesn't ask that of her, and she does not ask perfection of him. She is there, like those who gathered in the household of Cornelius, "before God to hear all that (has) been commanded by the Lord" (Acts 10:33). She knows that while her husband will proclaim the message, there is a very real sense in which they will both be listening to the word of God. She is comforted in knowing that they are both disciples of Christ. Therefore, differences which have divided them for the moment will be lost in the greater reality that they will continue their walk together with the Savior they both need.

Paul Jarrett serves the Naples Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

The Nature of Belief

“*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*” (John 3:14-16, NASB).

When the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized, Philip said to him, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” Philip then baptized him (Acts 8). In the preceding verses from the text in John, God informs

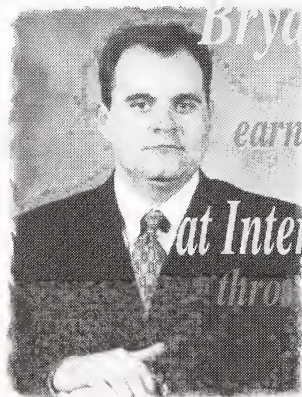
Randy Gore

us that eternal life comes from Jesus to those who

believe. “Believers” is one of the terms by which disciples of Jesus Christ were known in the first century (Acts 5:14, 10:45, 16:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:7, 2:10) and we are still known by this today.

Since God gives us the message in John 3 that salvation comes to those who believe in Jesus Christ His Son, obviously we need to know what it means to “believe” in the context of John 3, for Scripture tells us that even “the demons believe and shudder” (James 2:19). Demons obviously “believe” in the existence of the one true God, that Jesus Christ is in fact His Son, and they

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obviously tremble in their knowledge of God's power. However, these same demons are lost in their sin and are separated from this God that they "believe" in. In the context of James, the message is that "faith, if it have no works, is dead being by itself" (James 2:17), and that "a man is justified by works, *and not by faith alone*" (James 2:24, emphasis added), for "just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). James, like the writer of Hebrews 11, uses examples of Old Testament followers of God who were justified by obedience; that is, by a faith that led them to obey. Simple mental

acceptance of facts is not the "belief" that saves us that John writes of in this context.

Genuine faith goes beyond mere mental acceptance of Christ (which even the demons have) and is transformed into a living, life changing and active faith that results in obedience to God. When John wrote of salvation for believers, it was in the context of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) in which Jesus taught that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (verse 3) and that this means to be "born of water and the Spirit" (verse 5). Real belief includes obedience, which in the context of John 3 involves the new birth of



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baptism by the agency of the Spirit. Much the same thought is found in Jesus' statement in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." True belief will involve obeying, just as the Ethiopian of Acts 8 desired to do and did.

The reference from John 3 comparing the lifting up of Jesus to Moses' lifting up the serpent cites an occurrence in the life of

Their faith prompted them to obey God at all costs, even the cost of their lives.

the children of Israel after God had rescued them from Egypt (Numbers 21). As they were later being attacked by poisonous serpents, God told Moses to make a serpent

of bronze and put it up on a standard and that if anyone was bitten by a snake they would be saved by looking upon the serpent. So, if anyone believed God and His Word, they would obviously obey and be saved. The same principle still applies: if a person believes in Jesus and what He says, that person will do what He says to do (be born again of water and the Spirit). This belief will motivate us to desire and to do God's will in our lives; not only when we are baptized, but for the rest of our lives.

John 3 concludes by saying in verse 36, "He who believes in the son has eternal life; but he who *does not obey* ("believeth not"—KJV; "rejects"—NIV, emphasis added) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." The word "believes" in this text is *pisteuon*, which literally means "to put trust in" or "to have faith in." The words "does not obey" translate the Greek word *apeithon*, which means to be disobedient. In this text, then, real belief is not

separated from obedience; a believer has eternal life but a disobedient person shall not see this eternal life and will receive the wrath of God. Since a person will either have eternal life or will not see life (but not both), a person who believes cannot be a person who does not obey. Again, true belief in God goes beyond mental acceptance of God and His Son to the conviction of God, His Son, and His will for our lives (which includes obeying His will). The belief that God expects from us goes beyond acknowledging His existence to believing what He says and that He means what He says. Our eternal reward (whether life or punishment) is related to the visible evidence of our faith. To the Roman believers the apostle Paul spoke of "the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation" (Romans 2:5b-8).

Remember the Old Testament "heroes of faith" mentioned in Hebrews 11. Their faith prompted them to obey God at all costs, even the cost of their lives. Their lives of active faith raise an important question for us today. What kind of a believer am I on a daily basis? Let us all seek to do God's will and glorify Him in all that we do. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17).

Randy Gore can be contacted at 4102 Macon Rd., Columbus, GA 31907. He can also be reached by e-mail at: RNGore@juno.com.

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the Lord's church has before it an open door of opportunity. Never before have we been afforded the opportunity to reach so many for so little. The cost of reaching your community and the world is now within the means of every congregation.

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An opportunity of unimaginable proportions lies at our door. Will we grasp this opportunity or will we let it slip? Millions of people, some your neighbors, are logging onto the internet daily. The number is expected to multiply at an astonishing rate in the next few years. What does that mean for the church. Well, nothing if we don't avail ourselves of this opportunity. But on the other hand it can offer great opportunity for teaching the lost. Not only is your site

Phillip Cochran

available locally but it is available worldwide. Once someone logs onto the internet with their computer they are as close as your next door neighbor (i.e. electronically speaking).

I suggest that you place an ad in the local paper on a weekly basis. Simply list the church name with the web site directly below it. Those who use the internet will know what to do. I would also recommend placing the web address on the church bulletin, church stationary, in fact every place that you can think of where others will see it.

The cost is within the budget of any congregation and the opportunity great. The Tryon church of Christ has a site at the following address: <http://www.webcarpenter.com/church/tryon>. Check it out and see what the internet has to offer.

Phil Cochran can be contacted at 239 Bradshaw Ave., Hendersonville, NC 28792, or by phone at (828) 697-2054.

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Purity Revisited

David Kneip

I would like to tell you about a book that I have read recently. *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* is by a young guy named Joshua Harris. Perhaps you've heard of it; perhaps you've been encouraged toward or discouraged from reading it. Frankly, as a single person, it's given me a lot to think about. I'm only going to highlight some points and principles; hopefully, this article will whet your appetite for more.

Harris begins by discussing the current dating scene. After explaining that dating as we know it has only been around for a hundred years or so, he describes seven potential perils of dating and says that we need some changes in the way we look at dating relationships. We need to see every relationship we are in as an opportunity to serve and imitate the love of Jesus. We also need to view our unmarried years as a gift from God. We should see intimacy as the reward of commitment and other people as not "things" to be "possessed."

Before we can implement changes in our lives, though we need to understand God's views of relationships and purity. We need to understand that, for God, love is neither a feeling, nor sex, nor ownership, nor manipulation. Love is service and worship, sincere, enduring, perfect, responsible, and hard work! Purity is a road, a direction, a way of life. Both males and females have responsibilities to help each other stay on

the path, not "flirting with darkness," as Harris says, but

also not trying to bite off too much too soon. Many of us have gone "too far" in relationships and carry a great deal of guilt from those experiences. Jesus cleanses us of those sins, but when we commit to a new life, our dating is to be pure and clean along with the rest of us.

How do we do it, though? How do we change those hard-dug patterns in our lives? If we're newly on the road, how do we avoid the pitfalls? A few hints: we need to get some good companions on the road, including our parents (hey – they've been there!). We need to be vigilant about who is helping us down the road; Satan is very sneaky about "helping" us when he's actually destroying us. We need to learn when to listen to our hearts and when to ignore them. We need to discover anew the world of male-female friendships, learning the difference between friendship and intimacy.

It will be hard to deal with other people who don't understand the commitments that we have made. If we commit to changing our relationship patterns, people may think we're crazy, that we're punishing ourselves unnecessarily, or that we're just plain wrong. We need to be always humble about our choices, remembering that Jesus' interactions with others were blanketed in humility. We need to be able to explain to

others why we change our behavior. Remember, friends, "blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of [Jesus]" (Matthew 5:11 [NIV]).

So does all this mean lots of lonely Friday nights? Well, no. Harris talks about "redeeming the time" that we have as young single people. There are lots of things that we'll need to know how to do when we are married, and now is the best time to practice. Practice developing close relationships by getting to know your family better. Practice seeking God with other people, not just alone. Practice financial responsibility by learning how to budget money and time. Practice parenthood by babysitting and taking care of children. Practice life skills – learn to cook, to fix a car, to change a light bulb, to care for a lawn. Spend time in the word developing a more biblical view of marriage. Examine yourself and your desires for a partner for a lifetime. Develop skills in moving from friendship to marriage once that right person is found, including worshiping, serving, and playing together.

Some of you may be saying, "Whoa!

This is heavy stuff!" I agree. It's very heavy. It's the most important set of decisions you will make in your life, second only to the decisions that lead you to a relationship with Jesus Christ.

As I said, this is an introduction to a book by which I have been greatly blessed. I encourage you to read it and to think about what it says. God bless!

David Kneip formerly served the Cole Mill Rd. church in Durham, NC, as a minister to its youth. He is now pursuing a graduate degree at Abilene Christian University.





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The Church is a Place of Belonging

the Church is a place where people can belong. Such is a bold claim. One can only wonder if the real is anywhere close to the ideal. Think with me!

Refugees, immigrants, illegal aliens. Many US citizens lump them all together in one group—undesirables, unwelcome, threats to our economic, social, and general well-being. How dare they think of trying to become part of “us!”

The sentiment was so strong in California that voters passed Proposition 187 to exclude illegal immigrants from medical, educational, and welfare assistance. Whether we still need or want those who will pick the crops at wages U.S. citizens will not tolerate is unclear. What is clear is that we don’t want to pay for the basic physical needs of these people. The sentiment seems clear: “Kick the bums out. These people are a liability.”

The problem is not a new one. Almost 2000 years ago, a man from Egypt traveled to Jerusalem to attend worship services. We are not certain why. As an ethnic Ethiopian, he could never attain full Jewish status. Strike one! Still he worshiped the God of the Jews.

The man from Egypt was also a eunuch. Deuteronomy 23:1 is certainly clear about his status — he was forbidden to enter the assembly of the Lord. Strike two! Still he sought God.

He had a few things going for him.

Robert J. Young

Certain aspects of his life encouraged his acceptance;

he had possessions and the prestige of high position. Yet his ethnic background and personal history were a liability. The Bible does not tell us how he was received in Jerusalem, but one can imagine that he noticed the flashing neon sign: “No foreigners wanted. No eunuchs allowed..” Perhaps a less than warm reception coupled with a heart that desired to intimately know and worship God were factors in his receptivity when Philip miraculously appeared on the desolate road to Gaza.

He really did not want much. Few demands. Only a plea from hopeful eyes and quivering lips, “Is there room for me? Could I follow this Jesus? I’m a foreigner, and despised by many. Can I become a Christian?”

You already know the story, do you not? A man who had always been on the outside looking in was for the first time invited to come inside. The Bible concludes the story by noting: “And he went on his way rejoicing.”

Let 2000 years pass. Another person attends worship services. We do not know why he chooses to worship in this church on this day; he has never been there before. Perhaps he simply wants to worship God. How will this outsider be received? Strike one?

The background of this stranger — much experience in the immorality and various forms of evil of the world — is well-known in the community and to most members of the church he chooses to visit.

Strike two?

He really doesn't want much. Few demands. Only a plea from hopeful eyes (if you show enough care that he makes eye contact with you), a plea that crosses quivering lips. "Is there room for me here? Can I follow Jesus with you? Can I worship God with you? I'm a stranger, despised by many? Can I ever be a Christian?"

Do you know how this story ends? Neither do I! This stranger who is now on the outside looking in has not yet visited us, and we have not yet decided whether we will welcome him inside so

that he may learn of Jesus and be saved. Will those who visit our assemblies "go on their way rejoicing" because they found acceptance and belonging and security and salvation? Or will they sadly look elsewhere to find the church that is like the NT church—a place where people belong? You and I will decide. Shall Acts 8 be repeated in our day? Are we that kind of New Testament church? Or some other kind?

Dr. Robert Young is Director of the Bible program at Ohio Valley in Parkersburg, West Virginia. He is also involved with the Pepper Center for Church Growth at OVC.

Hurricane Floyd made landfall on the North Carolina coast in the early hours of September 16. The most extensive damage resulted from severe flooding in eastern North Carolina. Some areas of the state received almost a year's worth of rain in a two week period. Churches and individuals have been quick to respond to the needs. The church of Christ in Greenville, North Carolina has been one of the churches coordinating relief efforts. The have been a clearing house for aid sent through the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Organization based in Nashville.

Emergency food boxes, grocery vouchers, Bibles and other supplies have been available to flood victims. Channel 12 News in Charlotte featured the Greenville church of Christ in one of its reports about the disaster relief.

ABILENE, TX...

Otis Gatewood died at the age of eighty-eight and was buried in Abilene on September 21. Otis had a legendary reputation as a tireless missionary. As a young man he served in several difficult stateside missions. In 1948 he was one of the first American missionaries into postwar Germany. From Vienna, Austria he coordinated mission efforts behind the

Iron Curtain. Gatewood was also active in education. He worked with Rochester (Michigan Christian College) and started the Eastern European College (now the International University in Vienna). He touched many lives on several continents and will be missed by those who knew him.

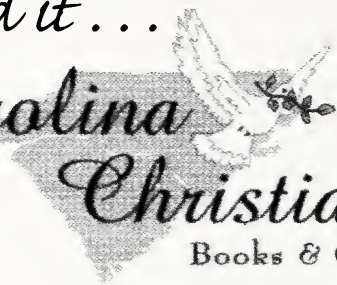
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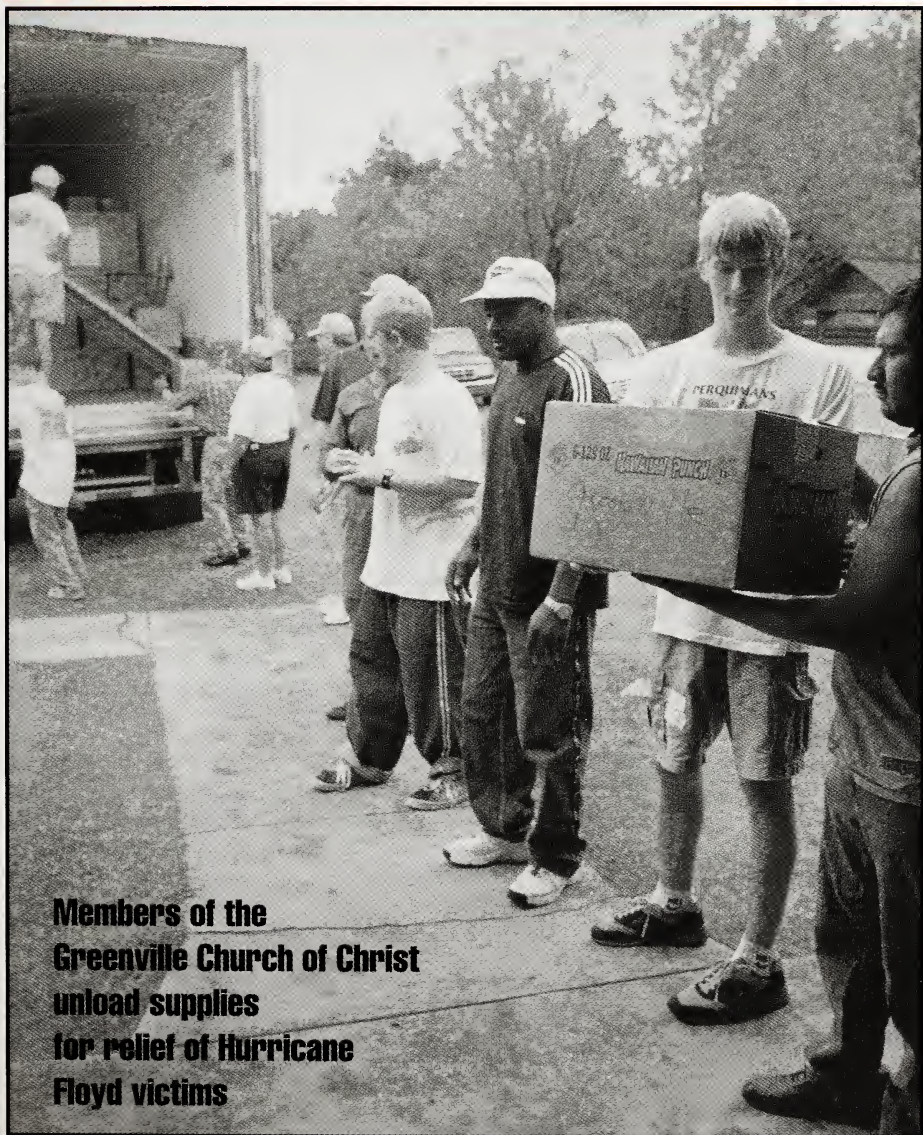
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Stones For Bread.....

Dennis Conner

In his book *What's So Amazing*


About Grace, Philip Yancey relates that during a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They discussed the issue for some time until C. S. Lewis, the famous British writer and apologist, entered the room. "What's all the rumpus about?" he asked, and in reply he heard that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." While all the other world religions espouse their various systems of earning divine favor, only Christianity offers the love of God freely.

Yet, for all of its talk about the grace of God, the "Christian" church historically has been largely devoid of the practice of grace, inflicting on mankind some of the most heinous and cruel acts of gracelessness. In the Middle Ages there were the Crusaders, Christian warriors who set out to save the holy city from the infidels, killing, ravaging and pillaging all the way to Jerusalem and back. There was the Inquisition, the official heretic hunters of the Catholic church that ferreted out the supposed "false teachers" by use of cruel and merciless tortures, extracting "confessions" and then putting the heretics to death. In our own country there has been the hysteria of the Salem with trials, in which innocent women, some of them little more than children, were put to death for being witches,

when in reality they were simply the victims of

gossip and hysteria. More recently, I heard a minister of one of the mainline denominations refer to the murderer of an abortion clinic physician as "a hero." In October, 1998 a young homosexual man named Matthew Shepherd was tied to a fence, brutally pistol whipped, and then left to die in the cold Wyoming night. One preacher said that he intended to show up at the funeral and dance on Shepherd's grave. The Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas, (which has a website on the internet called "godhatesfags.com") sent some of its members to picket the mourners as they made their way to and from the grave. Through the late 1800's and the better part of the 1900's members and leaders in the Ku Klux Klan would settle down comfortably onto their church pews on Sunday morning after spreading hate and violence through the week. Yancey writes, "Christians have spent enormous energy over the years debating and decreeing truth; every church defends its particular version. But what about grace? How rare to find a church competing to 'out-grace' its rivals."

Many people come to churches in the hope of finding healing, compassion and understanding, only to encounter instead shame and judgment. They come to the church looking for and needing grace, often finding instead a stone wall of what has been coined "ungrace." What a cruel trick it is when hurting sinners come to the church needing to experience grace,



only to be presented one or more forms of ungrace. It's like giving a stone to the child who asks for bread.

The protest may be offered that such acts and attitudes are not the marks of the true Christian church, and that would be correct. The church that truly belongs to Christ will treat people like Christ did, and Christ treated them graciously. As a matter of fact, it was Jesus' practice of ministering to sinners with grace that most often got Him into trouble with the religious establishment of His day. Witness the response to His kindness toward the sinful woman who interrupted the meal in the home of a prominent Pharisee and proceeded to lavish gratitude upon Jesus by washing his feet with the fountain of her tears, drying them with a towel of her own hair, and anointing them with an expensive oil (Luke 7:36-50); the threatenings, revilings and self-willed blindness of the leaders when He restored sight to a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:13-34); their destructive scheming when Jesus on the Sabbath returned to a man the full use of his once withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14); or their pimpishness when they self-righteously utilized for their own purposes the sin of the woman caught in the act of adultery, only to slither away in silence when the Lord forced them to confront the reality of their own sin (John 8:3-12).

Jesus constantly engaged the masses of sinners all around Him, lavishly dispensing the healing power of divine grace. Messed up, broken, disillusioned lives
Carolina Christian

became whole through their encounters with the Lord of grace. By His grace and compassion sins were forgiven and hopes restored. And by the ministrations of His grace fears were aroused, jealousies ignited, and self-righteous judgment stirred. Wherever the grace of Christ traveled, it was inevitably met with the resistance of hardened ungrace on the part of those who should have known better.

Today many of us shrink from the sinful masses and isolate ourselves from their "polluting" influence. We look at the wretchedly sinful lives of many of those around us and judge them unworthy of our time and care, or we recoil from them in the fear of somehow being infected by their moral uncleanness. And woe to those already in our midst who should ever allow themselves to fall into sin or who refuse to fall into line with our way of thinking. The fearful weeds of compromise and contamination take root and strangle out the fragrant flowers of grace.

How easily we forget. We forget that God came to us when we were at our worst and treated us infinitely better than we deserved to be treated. Deserving justice, He bestowed grace. Meriting death, He offered us life. Worthy only of divine wrath and judgment, He nevertheless met us with compassion and forgiveness.

When the fallen come to us asking for, begging for, the bread of grace, do we dare to give them instead the stones of ungrace?



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Urgent Need!

The Facade of Hypocrisy.....

Just read through the gospels and you will find

Ron Newberry

in the rule than the good being done for a fellow

human being. numerous encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day, particularly the Pharisees. Their very name is synonymous with hypocrisy.

The church
is aware of
painting facades
on our eyes
in order to make
us look like the
real thing.

With few exceptions their meetings, questions and interviews with Jesus were not for the purpose of seeking answers or a quest for truth. The questions were not the

outgrowth of honest hearts inquiring into the mind of Christ. Their questions were attempts to snare Him in some error. They were hypocritical to the core.

I understand that on the French Riviera it is such an important status symbol to have a balcony on an apartment that it is quite common to see balconies painted on the walls of apartment houses. People even paint wet laundry hanging on a clothesline, just to give it a touch of reality. Hypocrisy is a facade painted just to give it a touch of reality.

Two thousand years ago a philosopher by the name of Epictetus said, "Men are disturbed not by things that happen but by their opinion of the things that happen." This is the problem of the Pharisees. Their understanding of events tell more about who they are than it does about who Jesus is. They would see Jesus heal on the Sabbath and then declare that to be sinful. They were most interested

human being.

Jesus set the record straight in Matthew 12:11-12, "He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'"

In Mark 2:27 He offered this stern rebuke, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

In Matthew 7:5 the Lord taught His listeners, and us, that it's hypocritical to go speck hunting in another's eye while the plank in our own eye impairs our vision. Still further, there is the reminder in Matthew 23:25 that it is hypocritical to spruce up the outside of our lives with little or no concern for the inside.

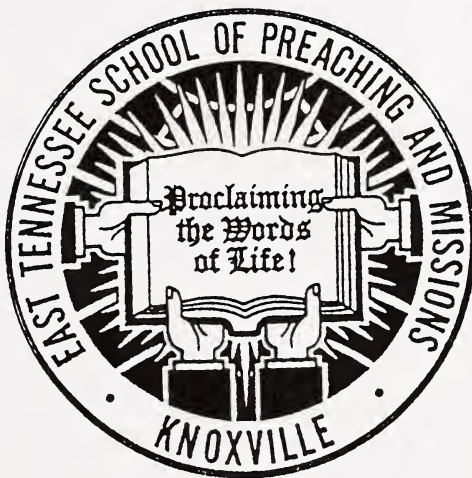
Bottom line, we ought to check our attitudes from time to time to make sure our questions grow out of a pure heart rather than a heart that's filled with hypocrisy. We need to inventory our stock of concerns to make sure that they are genuine and not selfish. We should beware of painting facades on our lives in order to make us look like the real thing. Instead, let us be the real thing.

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The Christian Adventure.

embedded within the first two chapters of the short epistle which we know as First John, the apostle presents seven tests of Christian behavior. They were given because of the problem believers were having with false prophets and teachers. The benefit of those tests for us today is that they provide us with a gauge by which we might measure our claims to be disciples of Jesus Christ. It's easy to claim to be a disciple and even easier to use the right jargon, but the acid test will be seen in a person's behavior. In 1 John 2:5-6 we find the fourth test (the other six are found in 1:6, 8; 2:3, 9, 15, 29) when he states, "This is how we know we are in him: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

Freedom from the power of sin is an often ignored facet of salvation. Although we do not live *sinless* lives, the course of our lives has been changed and we no longer regard ourselves as slaves to sin (Romans 6). We serve a new Master, and He is Jesus. When Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," (John 10:10), he was speaking of that new life which is free from the guilt and burden of sin; free because we have been raised with Him and are in Him. But with that freedom comes the responsibility to *live* the new life. If we are not walking as Jesus did, then we need to ask ourselves why. How

Peter Rode

*Give your
life to Him and hang
on! The adventure of
a lifetime is just
beginning.*

can we claim to be His disciples if we are not learning from Him and following his example? Our claims will ring hollow and shown to be false! How can we claim to have the Holy spirit living within us and how can we claim to be filled

with the Spirit if we don't exhibit any of His fruit in our lives?

Os Hillman ("The Gospel of the Kingdom," Nov. 16, 1988: www.devotionals.net) has observed that there are three distinct types of people who have responded in one way or another to Jesus. First, many come to Christ out of a need for salvation. The heart has been touched by His call on our lives. Such people consider and analyze the claims of Christ and make a decision for Him. It is a stage in which people are seeking blessing from God, and some never go past it. The second stage is the crisis stage. A crisis takes place, motivating these people to

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seek Christ. However, this motivation is not out of a pure love for Christ; rather, it is motivated by the desire to escape pain. This stage is best characterized as "Help me, Lord." The third stage is that they begin to experience the gospel of the Kingdom. This is the place of conviction, the place where Jesus was in His earthly walk with His heavenly Father. There are relatively few people who live at this level, but these are experiencing the reality of a walk with God that is foreign to most others. They are seeing daily occurrences of His involvement in their lives. They are motivated by a deep love for Him.

What stage are you in your walk with

the Savior? I hope and pray that you are doing your very best to become more and more like Jesus, conforming to His attitude of humble obedience revealed in the prayer "...not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). Remember, we need to allow Him to work in our lives, and when we do He will "...do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

Give your life to Him and hang on! The adventure of a lifetime is just beginning.

*Peter Rode may be contacted at 5101
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The Battle With Sin.....

an old World War II veteran once told me that if you were to ask any soldier to name the hardest battle of the war, he would tell you it was the one that he was in. I believe this same response might well apply to the question of what constitutes the most difficult battle the Christian soldier has to face. It is the personal battle with sin in our own lives.

The apostle Paul, a great Christian soldier in his own right, endured all manner of suffering on behalf of the cause of Christ. When he wrote about the one thing which he feared could cost him his reward, however, he did not mention any of the persecution he had endured at the hands of others. Instead, he wrote "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In Romans 7:14-23 Paul described the struggle that he waged in his own body in terms with which we should all be able to identify. It was a struggle which often resulted in his failing to do the good he wished to do, and practicing the very evil that he did not wish to do. Paul found release from and victory in this struggle through Christ Jesus as he focused his mind on the things of the Spirit. If we are going to win the battle over the flesh in our own lives, we must follow Paul's example in focusing our minds on the Spirit. As he writes in Romans 8:6, "For the mind set on the

Paul Jarrett

flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit if life and peace."

While the Christian life will never be devoid of suffering and conflict, we can in large measure escape that suffering which is self-inflicted as a consequence of our own sin as we surrender to the will of God. Those in the world may malign us, but we should gladly endure that type of suffering in return for the life and peace which comes to those who live "no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (read 1 Peter 4:1-4, 14-16).

And in the heat of the battle, let us not forget that we "are more than conquerors through Him who loved us," (Romans 8:37).

Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

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.....Two Questions: Part Five

W

ere at the point
in our study of

Stephen J. Walls-Mathis

have Christ in our hearts
— if we are going to have

Colossians where we focus on the second question: “So what?”

It’s clear that the first question, the “what” of Colossians is significant to our life of faith. We know that this is a letter written from the Apostle Paul, written to the church at

Colosse and to Christians everywhere. Paul is reminding us that everything we need is found in

Christ. His presence in our lives is enough to empower to us to live holy lives:

- Jesus Christ has redeemed us from our sin, making reconciliation with God possible;
- Jesus Christ dwells in the hearts of all believers;
- Jesus Christ provides us with a model for love and service; and
- Jesus Christ calls us to give up our lives for His sake, for the sake of His gospel and for the sake of His church.

That’s the “what” of Colossians. Now we ask “so what?” So what does all this talk of Christ’s sufficiency and presence have to do with my life in the closing days of twentieth century America?

Read what Paul writes in Colossians 3:1-4:6. In this “so what” section he calls us to live out the faith we proclaim. It’s not enough to know about the Gospel or to profess Christ with your lips. You have to die to self and let Christ live in you and through you. If we are going to

abundant, eternal life — we have got to change from the core of our being. God expects us to be like Christ; in fact, He wants us to *be* Christ in our homes, in our churches, in our jobs and in this dark and lonely world.

That will only happen if we have given our lives to Christ and have been transformed by His grace. If there is no change in our heart and in the way we live then we are dead spiritually.

What kind of change is God calling us to? Paul highlights three areas of change in this “so what” section. One, the heart; two, our lifestyle; and three, the life of the church.

Number One: Change Your Heart (Colossians 3:5-11)

God calls on us to put to death sexual sin and covetousness because these sins destroy relationships and communities. We see it happen all the time. No matter what the world tells us, there are no secret sins. The very sin we try so hard to hide causes the greatest destruction.

But now, by God’s grace, Christ is living in you. So what? So, that means we have got to be the kind of people that protect and value sexual purity. We recognize and affirm the place God has given to sexual pleasure in the life of a married couple. We say “no” to willful desire that goes against the will of God, whether its’ sexual impurity, dishonest speech and activity, defamation of

another's character, or greed and envy.

Number Two: Change Your Lifestyle (Colossians 3:18-4:1)

Your life has an impact on other people, whether you want it to or not. Make sure it is a godly impact! Submit to your spouse, love them, honor them, never treat them harshly. Your life belongs to Christ! Treat your spouse the way Christ treats them.

Honor your parents. Remember that as children your responsibility is to please the Lord. That means don't talk back, even under your breath. Don't bad mouth your parents, even when it's

"cool." Live up to your responsibility.

And parents, we cannot treat our children like second class members of the family. They are a gift from God, and He expects us to model His presence in their lives. It's so easy to overpower them, to force them to do what you want, especially when they are young and smaller than you. God has a word for us about this: DON'T. Do not embitter them against you, or against God, the Father of all. Your life belongs to Christ. Live like it in your home.

Live like it on your job, too, whether you are the employee or the boss. If you are working for someone else, remember

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that you are ultimately working for God. Your job performance and your attitude toward coworkers, employers, subordinates, customers, etc., need to reflect the abundant life you now have in Christ Jesus.

Number Three: Change Our Way of Doing Church.

We have a mission in this world, a two fold purpose for being here: to build each other up and to redeem the world. Neither of these will happen until we focus on God, depend on His Spirit, and claim the identity that is ours in Christ Jesus.

As God's people we have to act out of love for each other and for those who are lost, rather than some short sighted, institutional concern. People, and the needs of people, must always be more important than programs, buildings and agendas. We have got to be involved in each other's lives, connected throughout the week the way parts of a body are connected. Is that going to happen once a week between Bible class and worship? You know the answer to that question.

No, if we are going to be the people of God, then we have got to change some of the ways we go about this life we call faith. If we are truly the Body of Christ,

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then our goal cannot be to maintain the status quo or simply keep on doing what we have always done. With a renewed

commitment to Christ and to the life changing Gospel alive within us and among us, we must have the courage to change our practices for the sake of those whom God loves. If we are to be the Body of Christ, then we must decide to do what will build up the faith of the saints who gather together and decide to do what will connect with the lost.

What is God's plan for saving the world? Having a friendly sign outside of the church building and plenty of available parking for guests? No. His plan

for redeeming the world is for those who are lost to see Christ in the lives of His people.

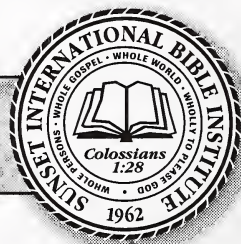
The "what" and "so what" of Colossians can be summed up in Colossians 3:14, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." What? God loves you. So what? Love God, love each other, love the lost enough to change your life and make a difference in theirs.

*Stephen J. Walls-Mathis can be contacted at
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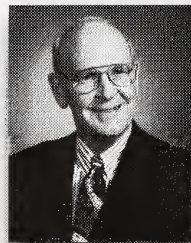
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*Doyle Gilliam
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.....The Most Excellent Way

I want to tell you about a church.

This church had a lot of struggles. They were in a big city with lots of people from lots of different places, and they knew people who subscribed to all sorts of religions and practices. One day a preacher came to town and converted quite a few folks. After he left, they began to have problems. They had become enamored of some of the famous Christians they'd had contact with, and the church was beginning to split over who their real leader was. They were dealing with sexual immorality, church members suing one another, whether it's better to be married or single, and how to deal with the other religions in town.

Things got so bad that they wrote their former preacher, seeking advice. He wrote back, trying to correct some of their problems. Some members were exhibiting gifts of the Spirit, and people didn't know how to deal with it. Unfortunately, they had responded in a typically human way—by saying that some people had “better” gifts than others and by either getting discouraged or arrogant (depending on if they were the ones with lesser or greater gifts).

Have you figured out that the preacher is Paul, and the church is the Corinthian congregation? The reason I wanted to introduce their story to you is that one of the most famous passages in the Bible is couched within their situation, but very often we take it out of

David Kneip

context. It's 1 Corinthians 13, also known as the “love

chapter.” Paul wanted the Corinthians to see that love can overcome even the greatest disputes. Now, I'm not saying that the use of this chapter outside of the context in which it was originally placed is wrong. Far from it! However, as a general rule, we need to be very careful about the ways we treat Scripture.

That said, what is this chapter teaching us? The first thing we notice is that this love—this perfect, divinely inspired love which can bear all things and so on—is supposed to take place within a church. That's right, no matter how much we don't like the people we go to church with, no matter whether we agree with them on certain questions of church practice, no matter whether they have ever shown love to us, we are to love our Christian brothers and sisters! As the first few verses of the chapter state, it doesn't matter what good deeds we do, what gifts we have, or what nice things we say, if we aren't actively loving, our deeds, our gifts, and our words are all for nothing.

Let's take up a few points. We often misunderstand that “Love is patient” (v. 4). “Patience” in the Bible doesn't just mean being willing to wait on something. Consider the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32-34. God is patient with the Israelites, but that means that he withholds his judgment on the people with the hope that they will repent and turn to

(continued on bottom of page 16)

Hurricane Floyd Disaster Relief and Recovery Report

after the devastation here in Eastern North Carolina as a result of Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd, many of us were asking: "What can one person, one family, or one church do? The needs are so great, what difference could we really make?" Still, we were determined to show our faith, hope, and love to this community. Over half our congregation committed their time

Carl Etchison

WHAT A
BLESSING TO
RECEIVE
OVER A HALF
MILLION
DOLLARS
WORTH OF
SUPPLIES!

and effort to this work.

But even with that level of support, we were limited as to what we could do. We did not imagine how well the family of God would respond to the needs of this area. So many have responded with assistance that together we have made more than a difference here; we have made an impact! An impact for Jesus and for His church.

With the Churches of

(continued from bottom of page 15)

him. That is what we are called to do; to withhold judgment on people because they just might change. And we are to help them in whatever way we can.

Re-read that story about the golden calf, and consider what we can learn from God about a couple of other attributes of love: being not self-seeking and not easily angered. How was God always protecting, always trusting, always hoping, always persevering? Try to think of other Bible stories in which God exhibited his love to us.

Do you see my point? All of those wonderful facets of love — we can't do them on our own. The only way we know to love is from God. Hopefully, we learn God's love from our parents, from Carolina Christian

teachers, from people at church. But above all, we learn about God's love from His word in Scripture and His word in Jesus. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Right now, as Paul says, we see each other and God in a dirty mirror, but when Jesus returns, we shall see each other clearly, as God sees us.

My challenge to you: look actively for ways you can show God's love to people around you. Family, friends, enemies... we are called to love them all. Look at God's love for us, and turn it outward to others.

Amen; so be it!

David Kneip is a graduate student at Abilene Christian University. He can be contacted at 141 College Dr., Abilene, Tx 79601; or by e-mail at dck99a@acu.edu.

Christ Disaster Relief organization in Nashville, TN, supplying about half of the support, our congregation of 150 became a local "care distribution center." What a blessing to receive over a half million dollars worth of supplies (enough to help over 3,000 families)! In addition to that, contributions totaling more than \$260,000 came from over 100 churches and countless individuals from 26 states. We have also given away 3,200 Bibles and 1,500 sermon tapes, more than 3,000 family food boxes, 700 plus personal care boxes, 500 plus baby care items, 500 plus cleaning kits, and \$15,000 in food vouchers for grocery store perishables.

The impact on our community was also recognized by such organizations as the Red Cross. One store wanted to donate new toys for children that had lost theirs in the flood, so they called Red Cross to see who to give them to. The Red Cross said, "Call the Church of Christ. They're the ones helping the children." So, they did. And we are! Our youth group will help distribute new toys to as many as 2,000 children.

The Greenville church is committed to providing relief in three stages. The first stage, immediate disaster *relief*, concluded on October 16. The second stage — disaster *recovery* — covering the next three months, will involve: temporary housing assistance, housing clean-up crews, "Back to School Packs" for Pitt County students, interior home

revitalization, and "Coats for Kids" of Pitt County (November). Phase three — disaster *restoration* — is long-range (twelve months) and will involve: minor residential housing repair, tree cutting and removal, landscaping and light construction.

So, what do I tell people now? I tell them that God still cares for them, even in times of disaster. I tell them that Christians will help care for them in times of need. I tell them that Christ's church is much bigger than what they can see. How do I know? I knew it from the Bible, but I learned it again when I saw it for myself.

Carl Etchison serves the Greenville church as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at 1706 Greenville Blvd. SE, Greenville, NC 27858-4810. Those interested in helping with the intermediate and long-range phases should call the church office at (252) 752-6376. To view photos of the Floyd Disaster, check the church's web page at www.sower.net.

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Is God Hard to Please?

the answer to the question raised by

Burl Curtis

Following the example of Jesus. Paul says in Romans

the title of this article depends on what you choose to be and do. In one lifestyle it is impossible to please Him and in another His “yoke is easy” and “His burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). Respectfully, God gives you the power to choose your lifestyle.

Thankfully, the one true God, the I AM does what pleases Himself. As the psalmist observes, “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). He was pleased to have His fullness dwell in Christ (Colossians 1:19) and to bruise Christ for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:10), thus providing a way of salvation for all mankind. God’s word accomplishes what He pleases. As the prophet once said, “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11), and as Peter noted, “this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25).

Paul and his co-workers taught the Thessalonians how they “ought to walk and to please God,” (1 Thessalonians 4:1), and so we also must be taught. If you find this hard to do, then you will find God to be hard to please. On the other hand, if you find His yoke to be easy, you will find God to be easy to please.

Among those things that bring pleasure to God are the following.
Carolina Christian

15:3, “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” That is, Jesus didn’t seek to do that which pleased Him personally, but instead did what was needed to meet the needs of sinners and accomplish God’s will. He always did what pleased God. Jesus said to the Pharisees once, “And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:29). God Himself affirmed, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Likewise, it pleases God when we strive to be like Jesus.

The foolishness of preaching. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,” (1 Corinthians 1:21). Many today are not pleased with preaching itself, much less the changes that true preaching requires. If you find it hard to listen to the truth preached and harder to obey, you are out of tune with God.

Offering the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Hebrews 13:15a). David wrote, “I will praise the name of God with a son, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. The humble shall see this, and be glad,” (Psalm 69:30-32a). If it is easy for you to continually thank and praise God, then you will find Him easy to please.

Lips that confess His name (Matthew 10:32-33). Among Paul’s faithful sayings is

this, "If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:12-13).

Doing good. The writer of Hebrews exhorted, "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased," (Hebrews 13:16). To the Galatians Paul said, "Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," (Galatians 6:10).

Sharing with others, for "with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Obedient children. "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord," (Colossians 3:20). One reason this pleases the Lord is that He knows if children are taught to obey their parents in all things, they are in a good position to obey Him in all things.

Keeping God's commandments. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight," (1 John 3:22).

Brethren dwelling together in unity (Psalm 133:1). Today departing brethren need to take warning because, by their false teaching, they are sowing discord among brethren, which is one of the seven abominations unto the Lord (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Finally, *doing God's will pleases Him.* "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting

covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Is God hard to please? It is impossible to please Him if you choose the life-style of doubt and disbelief. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). It is impossible to please the Lord if you follow the sinful nature (flesh); "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (Romans 8:8-9).


Is God hard to please? The psalmist tells us, "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm 147:11). The wise man said, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7).

Is God too hard for us to please? Enock, the seventh from Adam (Jude 14), by faith "was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). Since Enoch — who did not even have the benefit of the examples of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and Paul — pleased God, we are without excuse.

Burl Curtis was the second editor of Carolina Christian and now resides at 118 Red Oak Lane, Searcy, AR 72143-4515.

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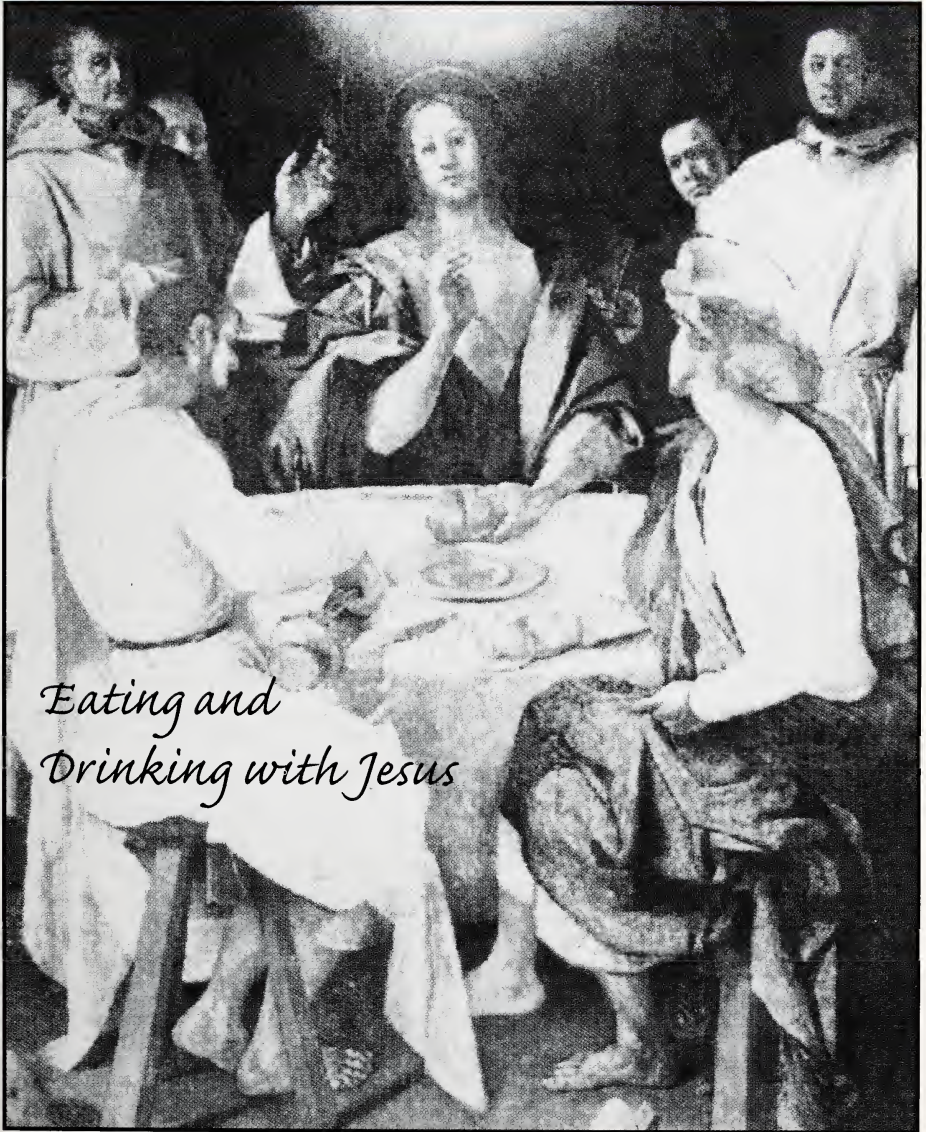
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*Eating and
Drinking with Jesus*

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Y2k Reflections.....

Mark Hudson

I think somebody responsible for all

the Y2K hype is sitting in a little room somewhere, laughing, counting money. I read this morning a representative from FEMA called the millennium crash a "non event." Go figure!

I can remember when I was 8 years old figuring out that I would be 42 when 2,000 started. 42 seemed old at the time. I wish I had taken time to record my predictions with a Y2K compliant No. 2 lead pencil. It would be interesting to read today what my expectations were for this new year.

Perhaps the biggest unforeseen change in daily life has been the computer and the web. Even with computers it is amazing how much the same things are. Although it's Instant Messages rather than voice, teenagers are still tying up phone lines. We still drive cars, eat food, and have fathers and sons argue about hair. Of course, kids now have crew cuts and their dads grow long hair — I predicted this one.

Who would have thought that cassette tapes would still have a market? Albums have shrunk and gone digital. We passed through the age of "hi fi" and high five. Our kids will never "play a record," nor will they make a chain of pull tabs from coke cans. They will never know the frustration of trying to open a bottle or can without a "bottle opener." Ever open a soda can with a Phillips screwdriver? We got creative learning how to open a Coke bottle on the tailgate latch of the pickup. Our kids will never know the adventure of collecting bottles to return for deposit to buy candy bars at the IGA. And how can we say

buying milk at the gas station is really more

convenient than home delivery? The milk man went the way of the ice man. It looks as if the postman and paperboy will also pass into history. "Home shopping and banking" requires a modem rather than a truck. The time-honored expression "the check is in the mail" will soon have no relevance in society.

Who would have guessed that Walter Cronkite would still be the most trusted man in America? Of course, Walter doesn't have a lot of competition these days.

Who would have guessed 35 years ago that Ford and Chevy would produce imitations of Toyotas? Who would have guessed that the VW Beetle would be the Y2K "BUG"? Who would have guessed the Beetles singing group would still be making news? And did Elvis ever really leave the building?

Who would have thought that Ronald McDonald would become the world's largest purveyor of "fine foods"? Did you ever expect the clown to experiment with fried chicken and pizza before figuring out that a hamburger ain't a hamburger without lettuce and tomato? I never would have guessed that frozen food would become so normal, and I never would have guessed that frozen food would be cooked in plastic rather than "tin foil." And can you believe a generation of people now believe a microwave oven is required to thaw frozen food?

Even with all these changes, the steadfastness of God's love continues. God is still good! God is still in control! May you enjoy His blessings in the coming year.

Eating and Drinking With Jesus...

Even the casual reader is likely to notice that in

Dennis Conner

with the King of heaven and earth.

Luke's story of the life and ministry of Jesus' meals receive more than a passing notice. In fact, they are crucial to Luke's understanding of Christ and His gospel. Jesus ate with all sorts of people from hypocritical Pharisees to pious sinners. The message? The gospel is inclusive, not exclusive. Those who find themselves outside the kingdom are there because of their own choosing. Just as all sorts of people invited Jesus to sit at their tables, so He invites all to share in His banquet.

The meal scenes in Luke also provide us with a look into the heart of our Lord. They allow us to see His contempt for false religion as well as His compassion and forgiveness for penitent sinners. The meals reveal Jesus' refusal to be bound by the stereotypes and prejudices of men. His ministry of grace would not be halted by the societal or religious barriers erected by foolish people. The meals were more than polite overtures; they were encounters

This month we give attention to three of the meals recorded by Luke. Our hope and prayer is that this issue of *Carolina Christian* will both instruct and challenge our readers. May they instruct us in the ways of the kingdom gospel, and may they challenge us to follow Jesus in a true gospel ministry.

As Elmer Prout observed many years ago, "So does this Lord of the Table invite us to dine with Him and in dining demonstrate the gospel," ("With Jesus at Table," *Firm Foundation*, July 6, 1982, p.4).

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Recovering Our Moral Vision. . .

a class that I am scheduled to take in January is called *1 Corinthians and Contemporary Ministry*. If there is a

book in the New Testament that speaks to the way the church should interact with

"How should the church respond to a culture that is so out of line with God's desire?"

and have an impact upon the culture in which it is planted, surely it's *1 Corinthians*.

The course is designed to explore the message of the apostle Paul in *1 Corinthians* as he addresses the same

issued faced by leaders in the church today. For instance, Paul opposes using culture based leadership models for church leadership. He stresses holiness in the community of believers. Paul discusses the pros and cons of hanging out with pagans. He addresses the Lord's Supper and what it means to participate in communion. The Holy Spirit and worship are major concerns, along with the participation of women in the assembly.

Is there a single one of those issues we haven't discussed and debated in the church in our modern cultural setting? Everyone of those issues has made its way into the discussion of churches trying to be culturally relevant while maintaining doctrinal soundness. In fact, many, if not all, of these concerns have at some point created tension that has frequently reached a breaking point dividing congregations.

How should the church respond to a culture that is so out of line with God's

Ron Newberry

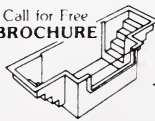
desire? Many churches have gone so far as to be indistin-

guishable from the culture based idea of church. In the words of William H. Willimon, Dean of Duke Chapel, "[liberal mainstream denominations] have reached over so far to save the world that we have fallen in." That's quite an admission from a self-identified liberal theologian.

Others have tried to avoid cultural contamination by becoming isolationists and avoiding any contact with the world. Too often the result is they become irrelevant to the world they say they wish to save.

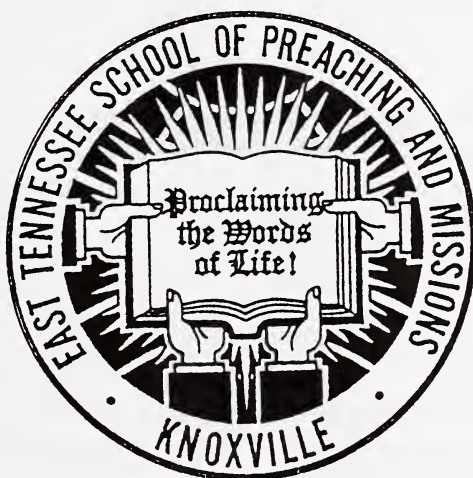
I do not believe either of those is an acceptable alternative. How can we be a saving influence in the world if we are totally out of contact with the world? On the other hand, how can we be a saving influence on the world if we are no different than the world? We must find a way to be sent into the world without being of the world. That is a challenge as fresh as today's encounter with our culture and as ancient as the Corinthian church's struggle to leave worldliness behind without losing contact with the world. A formidable challenge, wouldn't you say?

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Do You See This Woman?

(Luke 7:36-40)

Many times with Jesus

were anything but boring. Luke 7:36-40 relates a story about an unforgettable dinner at the home of a prominent religious leader.

Simon the Pharisee had invited Jesus to have dinner with him. When the dinner had gotten underway, a sinful woman entered the house and anointed him with perfume from a broken alabaster jar. She washed his feet with her tears, and then wiped them with her hair.

Simon, the host, likely had invited Jesus into his home because of his reputation as a prophet and a wonder-worker. The fact that Jesus was allowing this woman to touch him — and not just a casual touch, but an intimately tender touch from a sinful woman — gave Simon no little pause. He quickly concluded that Jesus could not be a prophet as he had been reported to be.

Simon had seen what he had seen, but because he wore the lenses of pride and self-righteousness, his vision was distorted. Jesus made an effort to give Simon a lens transplant. He told Simon a story that was intended to cut away the lenses that were distorting his vision and replace them with lenses of love and compassion. A moneylender had two outstanding accounts. One is for 500 denarii, the equivalent of two years income for a common laborer. The other

Johnny Melton

“... *We must be able to see people as Jesus saw them.*”

account was for 50 denarii, about two months income.

Neither debtor had the funds to repay the loan, so the moneylender canceled both debts. The question Jesus put to Simon which was to cut away the distorting lens was this:

“Now which of them will love him more?” Simon responded with the right answer: “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.” But apparently the surgery didn’t take. Simon still couldn’t see what Jesus saw, so the Lord drew him a word picture.

Simon saw the woman’s reputation — she was a sinner. Jesus saw her character — a servant. “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair” (Luke 7:44).

Simon saw the woman’s past abuse of sex. Jesus saw her chaste affection. “You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet” (Luke 7:45).

Simon saw the woman’s extravagance and was unimpressed. Jesus saw her sacrifice and recognized the love that motivated it. “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much” (Luke 7:46-47).

The Pharisee still didn’t get it. He still couldn’t see the point, so Jesus spelled it

out for him: "But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Simon saw only a sinner. Jesus saw love and faith in action.

There is hope for Simon that his lens transplant may have taken effect after Jesus continued to cut away at his lenses of pride and self-righteousness. At least, when the other guests began to speculate about Jesus' forgiveness of the woman's sins, he is not identified with them (Luke 7:49).

The critical question for modern readers in this narrative is "Do you see this woman?" Reflecting on the importance of seeing people as Jesus sees them, reminds me of a story that Tony Campolo tells about a birthday party he arranged on one occasion.

On a speaking engagement in Honolulu, Hawaii, Campolo found himself wide awake and hungry at 3:30 in the morning. On a side street not far from his hotel he found a little place still open. He ordered a cup of coffee and a donut. As he was sipping his coffee and nibbling his donut, a group of eight or nine prostitutes entered the place. He overheard one of the women tell the others, "Tomorrow's my birthday. I'm going to be thirty-nine."

One of the women responded, "So what do you want from me? A birthday party? What do you want? Ya want me to get you a cake and sing 'Happy Birthday?'"

The first woman responded, "Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that's all. Why do you have to

put me down? I was just telling you it was my birthday. I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should you give me a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?"

After the "ladies" left, Campolo asked the guy behind the counter, "Do they come in here every night?"

"Yeah," he answered.

"The one right next to me, does she come here every night?"

"Yeah," he said. "That's Agnes. She comes in here every night. Why d'ya wanta know?"

Campolo explained that he had overheard her say that tomorrow would be her birthday. Then he suggested, "What do you say you and I do something about that? What do you think about us throwing a birthday party for her, right here, tomorrow night?"

The guy agreed and told his wife, who did the cooking, about the idea. She said, "that's wonderful! You know Agnes is one of those people who is really nice and kind, and nobody ever does anything nice and kind for her."

Campolo started to make arrangements to come back to the diner the next night with decorations and a birthday cake. Harry, the guy behind the counter, nixed Campolo's offer of a cake. "No way," he said. "The birthday cake's my thing. I'll make the cake."

Harry's wife must have gotten the word out on the street about the party, because by 3:15 a.m. Campolo said the

place was wall-to-wall prostitutes. He described the next scene in these words:

"At 3:30 on the dot, the door of the diner swung open and in came Agnes and her friend. I had everybody ready (after all, I was kind of the emcee of the affair) and when they came in we all screamed, 'Happy Birthday!'

Agnes was visibly shaken. Her mouth fell open. Her legs appeared to wobble. Her friend led her to a stool while everybody sang 'Happy Birthday' to her. When Harry brought out the cake with all the candles lit, Agnes lost it. She broke down and cried.

Agnes was too overcome to blow out the candles, so Harry did it for her. Then he handed her the knife and told her, 'Cut the cake, Agnes. Yo, Agnes, we all want some cake.'

Agnes looked down at the cake. Then, without taking her eyes off it, she slowly and softly said, 'Look, Harry, is it all right with you if I...I mean is it O.K. if I kind of...what I want to ask you is...is it O.K. if I keep the cake a little while? I mean is it all right if we don't eat it right away?'

Harry shrugged and answered, 'Sure! It's O.K. If you want to keep the cake, keep the cake. Take it home if you want to.'

'Can I?' she asked. Then, looking at me she said, 'I live just down the street a couple of doors. I want to take the cake home, O.K.? I'll be right back. Honest!'"

Carolina Christian

Campolo said everybody watched Agnes leave with her cake in silence. And not knowing what else to do, he broke the silence by saying, "What do you say we pray?" After his prayer, Campolo said that Harry leaned over the counter and said to him, "Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?"

Campolo said this was one of those occasions where just the right words came to him, so he answered, "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning."

Harry thought about that for a moment, then he almost sneered as he replied, "No you don't. There's no church like that. If there was, I'd join a church like that!" (*The Kingdom of God is a Party*. Word Publishing: Dallas, Texas, 1990, pp. 4-9).

He concluded by asking, "Wouldn't we all? Wouldn't we all love to join a church that throws parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning?"

To be a church like that, we must be able to see people as Jesus saw them.

How do you see this woman?

Johnny Melton, a former editor of Carolina Christian, preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS.

The Sufficiency of Christ

(Luke 9:10-17)

Dennis Conner

It was an impressive meal by anyone's standards, rich or poor. Impressive and significant enough that all four gospel narratives include it. Impressive in the sheer magnitude of the miracle connected with it. Significant in what it revealed about the sufficiency of Christ.

Jesus had taken the disciples to a deserted area outside Bethsaida in order to be alone with them, but somehow the residents of the area heard that He was nearby. Immediately, as word spread, they began flocking to Him. Rather than bemoaning the loss of His private time with the disciples, Jesus received the people, telling them about the kingdom of God, healing those who needed it, bathing them in His compassion.

As the day with all its wonders drew to a close, the disciples suggested to Jesus — no, they *told* Him — to send the crowds away and let them then fend for themselves. He responded to their impertinence by saying, “You give them something to eat.” Of course, they didn’t have nearly enough for five thousand men plus the thousands of women and children that would also have been there. All they could scrounge together were five loaves of bread and two fish. In the hands of Jesus, the Master Provider, that would prove to be more than enough.

The Lord took the food into His hands, looked up to heaven, blessed the food and then began to distribute it to the disciples so that they in turn could

give it to the people. He then broke the food some

more. And some more. And more and more. When He was finished, and the people were finished eating, there were twelve baskets full of leftovers.

The people that day were not only hungry, but many of them were hurting. Jesus healed them and then he fed them. In other words, whatever their needs were, He met them. Jesus was sufficient to *provide*.

We may also see their need as an allegory of the human condition. They are us and their physical hunger is representative of the deeper hunger that we all experience — that emptiness, that hole, that hunger at the core of our being that yearns to be filled. Their need for healing bespeaks our own need for healing of the soul and heart. And note again the shocking amount of food that was left, the point being that Jesus *more* than met their needs. The feeding was an act of extravagant grace.

The story declares that Jesus Christ is the Great Provider. The hunger and hurting of the people simply could not exhaust Jesus’ ability to supply what they needed. What a marvelous testimony to the sufficiency of Christ’s gracious power to provide.

Now, let us return to the disciples and witness Jesus’ ability to *empower*.

They had just recently returned from a preaching mission intoxicated with the wine of success. They had experienced for themselves the power to heal. Thus, there

is every reason to believe that they had, in fact, instructed the Lord to send the people away. It was no mere suggestion. It was an act of pride; a pride that would soon wither when exposed to the heat of Jesus' brilliant rebuke.

"*You* give them something to eat." Despite all their previous success, they could only respond with, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish." Jesus' instructions were meant to emphasize their helplessness, inability and inadequacy. Still, despite their lack, Jesus would use them as the dispensers of His grace. He took what they brought to Him and blessed it. In their hands the bread and fish were pitifully insufficient. In His hands they were more than enough. Left to their own power the disciples were overwhelmed by the needs of the people — "send them away" was their solution — but once they entrusted to Jesus what meager resources they had, they were empowered to minister to the people.

There are some powerful principles for individual and corporate ministry here. First, our inadequacy is but an opportunity for Christ's sufficiency. God often works best when we are at our weakest. Thus, it is simply intolerable to plead inadequate resources. The issue in ministry is not our inadequacy, but Jesus' power. What do we need to save the lost, meet peoples' needs and build churches? Enough money? More programs? Talented people? And what if we don't have enough of these things? Will our Carolina Christian

pleas of inadequate resources be favorably looked upon by God? The answer to these latter questions is "no." The answer to the first (what do we need?) is the willingness to entrust to the all-sufficient Christ what we do have and then let Him empower us as instruments of His grace.

Second, our pride will bring a sure rebuke. Like the disciples when they first returned from their successful preaching mission, we today sometimes forget the source of our power and effectiveness. Their power came from God. Their success was from God. Without Him, they could do nothing. And neither can we.

This dinner on the grounds reminds us that Christ is all-sufficient. He alone is sufficient to provide for any and every human need. And Jesus is all the power we need to be effective servants to the needy masses.

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Woe to Pharisaism

(Luke 11:37-54)

Amos Allen

In the seventh grade I argued passionately with a fellow student about how long Methuselah lived (Genesis 5:27). I was right and he was wrong (by four years). My superior Bible knowledge was validated as well as my moral superiority and my chances of going to heaven. I got it right and he got it wrong, thus making him useless to me as a classmate or a human being (I'm serious).

In Luke 11 Jesus was invited to eat a meal in the home of a fellow Hebrew of the Pharisee sect. Immediately, Jesus (intentionally?) created a disturbance by not washing His hands before eating. This was a serious no—no to some. From the beginning of the chapter Jesus said some things really matter—like prayer, obeying God, repentance and self-control. There are some things that matter and there are some things that matter less or not at all.

The Pharisees worked harder at getting their religion right than most of us ever will. Their personal discipline would put most of us to shame today. They were serious, but they were serious about small things that kept them from seeing and doing the big things.

How do we know what is big and what isn't? How can we determine what matters and what matters more?

In three different chapters of Luke (7, 11, 14) Jesus ate with Pharisees and ended up pointing out how misguided they were. These serious students were

seriously missing the boat in terms of how to treat people and how to respond to God. How did they miss God while trying to please and defend Him? Observing them and their mistakes might help us to avoid the same ones.

In Luke 11, beginning with verse 37, Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and opted not to wash his hands. The host disapproved, which lit a fuse under his guest. Jesus made a strong point and illustrated it six times (it appears that the point was important to Jesus). The point was this: the Pharisees made themselves look righteous and godly, but their minds and spirits were full of trash that they dumped on God and other people.

Somehow they developed a religious system that ignored God while presuming to speak on God's behalf. They told people what God wanted without having a clue what that really was. They convinced themselves they were right and good while disgusting the One they were supposedly promoting. And, perhaps worst of all, they got away with it! It's no wonder people saw God as angry and hard to please.

As religious leaders, the Pharisees discouraged and prevented people from loving God and one another. I doubt that they intended to do this, but what they emphasized and practiced had this exact effect.

In Luke 7 we find Jesus at the table of another Pharisee when a "sinful woman" walked in and expressed her gratitude for

something Jesus had said or done. The Pharisee was uncomfortable with Jesus knowing this type of woman. Jesus said that was not the point. The point was that this woman had been reached by the love of God and she was reveling in it. The counterpoint was that the Pharisee had not experienced God much at all, as his actions revealed quite well.

The Pharisee chose to emphasize something that seemed right, but wasn't. Have we emphasized avoiding "evil companionship" to the point that we no longer care for people? Have we emphasized making sure people don't get the wrong idea about our church rather than making sure people get the right idea about God?

Finally, in Luke 14 Jesus, as the houseguest of yet another Pharisee, healed a man on the Sabbath, which was another no-no. He revealed how hard of heart the Pharisees were by raising a question about animal rescue procedures, which was a yes-yes for them! He went on to expose their disregard for people, especially the poor and marginalized of society. He then aimed the attack at their resistance toward God due to pride, warning them that they would never see heaven if these attitudes and practices continued.

Have we parents emphasized certain rules at the expense of helping our children? Have we husbands and fathers protected our positions of authority at all costs, insensitive or unaware of the harm it produces?

At this point I want to address some issues raised in this article and offer three final observations.

1. *People want to be reassured over and over again that whatever motivated them to come to God is valid.* When people are converted to baptism or church attendance or any variety of things that are in themselves good and right, they often tend to emphasize that to others. The problem is, as important as these things are, they are not as important as Christ Himself. When we replace Jesus with anything less (which happens when we emphasize anything else *more* than Jesus), we are in serious danger of misguiding others (children, friends, Bible school class, etc.).

2. *There are things that matter, and there are things that matter more.* How you dress on Sundays, the type of songs you sing — these are important matters. But a love for God and people is more important and more primary. Working out differences is rarely easy, especially when it comes to matters of faith. Do we, though, want to "be correct" more than we want to become great lovers of one another?

3. *How do we know what is important and what is really important?* This is not always easy to discern, but there are some foundation stones on which to build our lives: loving God and people (Mark 12), the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; not as a system of binding law, but in the sense of providing principles for relation-

ships with God and people that are reiterated in the New Testament), the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), the “Lord’s prayer” (Luke 11), or the life of Jesus. When we stand on these and similar scriptures, we will not be shaken when less important rules or ideas are offered as the way of salvation.

4. *Why do we miss God in our efforts to please Him?* There seems to be something about fallen human nature that chooses to worship the creature rather than the Creator. We are expert at ignoring and forgetting God. This is where the classical spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, study of scripture) are most helpful: they point us to the Giver and away from the gifts.

The Bible is such a wonderful, amazing gift of God, but it is not all there is to God. Food, friends, and family are precious gifts, but they are not the Giver. We are prone to exalt and rejoice in the gifts and forget that they come from Someone. The Pharisees put a heavy emphasis on rules that were supposed to help people please God, but He was eventually pushed aside by their efforts to make people live and look right.

My observations are these:

A. *The Creator make rules that help people live in a healthy relationship with Himself and other people.* We, on the other hand, tend to make or enforce rules that maintain our control. Is “pick up your room” good for the child, or is it a form of control by a parent? Is “no unauthorized collections of money” what the Christians need, or a form of control by the leaders? Is “stay in line” helping the children, or just another way to let everyone know who is in charge?

B. *The Almighty is big and mysterious, and yet, at the same time, He has revealed so much about Himself.* This openness makes Him vulnerable in a sense. He is willing to let us take a look and choose for ourselves. We tend to hide our true intentions from prying questions. Spouses don’t include one another in what they are thinking or feeling. Church leaders leave Christians uninformed on a regular basis. Why? Perhaps because we are scared and suspicious of one another, not yet having learned that imitating God’s openness will free and strengthen us.

C. *The Great Lover is repeatedly described and pictured as One who comes near to His children. He is not distant or aloof.* In contrast, we tend to keep people at a distance, especially those we consider to be undesirable. We have reasons to not get involved, and we eventually come to detest the very people God is especially interested in helping. The elderly often stay alone in a house or a room, not getting the opportunity to be with people. So, when we visit, they ramble and take up a lot of our time. They don’t have a lot to give in terms of money, abilities or energy, so we don’t consider them to be of much value. The Hispanics, the African-Americans, the poor, the rebellious, the liberal, the conservative—we know whom to eat with and who to disdain, don’t we? Woe to such thinking!

I hope to apologize someday to my classmate for my Methusaleh “victory.” I don’t want to push people away from God in the name of “right religion.”

May the grace of God be with us all.

Amos Allen can be contacted at
631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

...Got the January Blues?

have you had enough turkey for an entire year? Seen so many relatives they're all starting to run together? Actually glad to be back in school? All right, maybe we shouldn't go that far! Seriously, though, some of you may be fighting through some serious post-holiday depression. It's funny that good things can bring us something other than great joy. We give people gifts, and we receive more than we could ever deserve, and yet we still feel empty. We get a break from school, but we're still bored, and when we go back, we're unhappy. Why is that?

There are a couple of other reasons some of you guys may be struggling right now. For those of you who aren't in these situations, keep them in mind; I bet you have some friends who are. I know some of you have not had the ultimate-American-dream Christmas. Your table might have been pretty sparse, both in terms of people and food. You may not have had many (or any) presents under your tree. You might not have been able to thank God for sending His Son because you were too busy trying to keep warm by a fire because the heat had been turned off.

Some of you may be in a spiritual desert right now. I've heard in the past that this time of year is kind of hard if you're a big camp person. January is the month farthest away from summer, and so you've got forever to wait to see all the camp friends. There might not even be

David Kneip

any youth rallies coming up. What's a person to do to get to some spiritual encouragement?

Let me propose an answer to all of these difficulties by reminding you of a story. It's the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well; if you want to read it for yourself, check out John 4. You may have heard about all the paradoxes in the story — male/female, Jew/Samaritan, Rabbi/sinner, etc. However, I don't want to emphasize these aspects of the story.

Listen to the things Jesus says: "If you knew the gift of God...you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "...Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst." "...A time is coming *and has now come* when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..." Jesus is talking about healing and restoration. He's telling the woman that she's living her life by means of the world when he wants her to live in the power of God. Jesus reminds her and us that the only person we can look to for what we truly need is our Father. When we realize this, we will have no other course of action but to worship him.

Our Father loves to give his people what they need and restore things to the way they should be. Isaiah 11:6-9 is one of the most familiar passages concerning this aspect of God's character: in those days, wolves and lambs will lie down together, children will be leaders, and babies will play with snakes. Strange

picture, and certainly not the way the world looks right now, right? But listen to this last verse: "...the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." When God restores lives, it looks really strange to the rest of the world – they might not have even known something was wrong! But, for the people who have been restored, they know God so much more fully than ever before that it is as if a flood of water has come rushing in and has filled up every empty place in their lives.

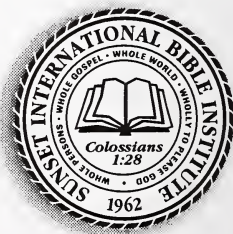
I think that is where God meets us in times like this. We might be empty from all of the activity of the last several

weeks. We might be empty from a lack of material things in our lives. We might be spiritually empty. God, though, is the great filler-upper. He takes empty people, people yearning to be filled with what only He has, and he fills them with more than they could ever ask or imagine. Please, friends, continue to pray to our Father to fill us all with his Spirit. Continue to actively love God and the people around you. Serve both your friends and enemies as best you can. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

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Immanuel

*Immanuel, God with us,
where are you tonight?
I've cried and prayed,
prayed and cried,
but there is no comfort in sight.*

*Immanuel, God with us,
why do You delay?
Is this anguish and this pain
the price I have to pay?*

*Immanuel, God with us,
how can you be so hard to find?
Dearest Jesus, I know that
Your touch, Your smile, Your voice
and Your eyes would be kind.*

*Immanuel, God with us,
tears blur my sight.
Please, gentle Shepherd,
stay close to me tonight.*

— Catherine Stancil

TRINITY, NC...

A new congregation has been established in Trinity, NC. The Trindale Church of Christ met together for the first time on Sunday, October 3. A group of approximately 40 Christians are now meeting at the Trinity High School Auditorium and ministering to the Trinity-Archdale community. Sunday classes are at 9:30 a.m., and worship services are at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. On Wednesday they meet in small groups at different homes. This new congregation would like to be on your mailing list for bulletins and announcements. Their address is:

Trindale Church of Christ, P.O. Box 14252, Archdale, N.C. 27263. For information about the congregation you may also contact Keith Williams at 336-475-5275 or Rob Albright at 336-472 0335, e-mail: lifesaver@northstate.net.

KINGSTREE, SC...

Billy McVey of the Central Carolina School of Preaching has announced that the school's mission trip to Honduras planned for December has been rescheduled for March, 2000. Additional volunteers, especially those who can speak Spanish, are still needed. For more information please call Billy at 843-382-5824 or

843-354-5462.

RALEIGH, NC...

The Rochester Heights Church of Christ will host its fifth annual Men's Day March 17-18, 2000. The theme will be "Y2K + Y2J = The New Beginning" and the keynote speaker will be John Marshall of Atlanta, GA. For more information call the church office at (919) 832-1277.

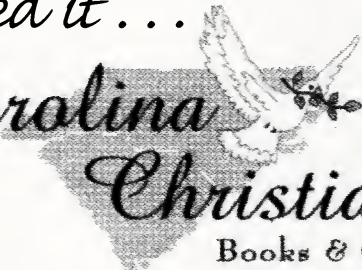
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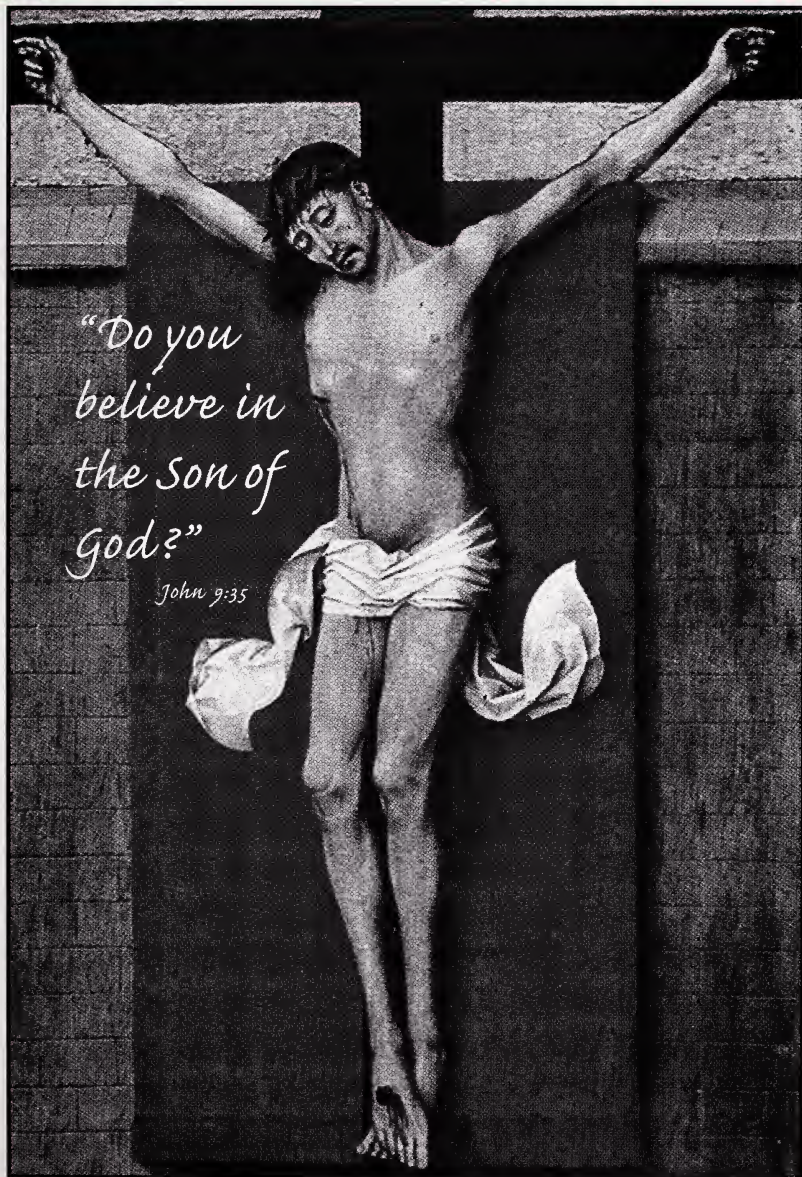
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The Defining Quality.

In John 13 Jesus knew that His

Dennis Conner

But Jesus was the Servant Lord and always looked

time on earth was running out. He had all His disciples gathered around Him to enjoy a last meal together, although they didn't understand this. At a certain point in the festivities that evening, Jesus got up from the table and began to perform a simple but most remarkable act. He began to go from one disciple to the other, towel wrapped around his waist and wash basin in hand, washing their feet. Judging by Peter's reaction it was an unthinkable act: "You'll not wash my feet, Lord!" It was also a signature act; it was the act that we have come to remember as the defining moment of that last evening together.

In that simple, common act Jesus laid bare the nature and essence and necessity of Christian love. In fact, He would go on to say that night that our claims of discipleship would be legitimized by our practice of love. But what kind of love is it that we are called to? In Jesus' simple but eternally profound act of washing the feet of His disciples we find the answer to that question.

Christian Love Serves

It is more than good intentions and pious sounding words. It is more than simple acts of kindness done at convenient moments. The nature of Christlike love is that it *serves*. It looks to the needs of others and puts them first. Were not Jesus' feet just as dirty as the feet of the others? And was He not, as Peter so energetically protested, the Lord? So, should not His feet have been the first ones washed? Yes to all those questions.

first to the needs of others. Not even this final night with His disciples would prove to be an exception.

And then He said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." We are called to a love that serves. As I write this there is an image of two young men stamped indelibly on my mind. Several years ago I was invited to preach in a meeting in Rockingham, NC. Earlier in the week I had been taken to visit with an elderly African-American brother whose days were spent in a chair in his small living room and whose name I have long since forgotten. His excessive weight made it difficult for him to walk and care for himself. He was a delightful man with a Bible on his lap and a joy in his heart.

One evening I noticed that two of the young men were absent from the fellowship meal. I asked about them and was told that they were at the home of the elderly brother. They would visit him regularly and would care for his feet, washing them and trimming his toe nails. His size and immobility made it impossible for him to do that for himself. Neither the elderly brother's race nor the unpleasantness of his need mattered to these young men. As they knelt before their aging brother, washing his feet and trimming his toe nails, it might as well have been Jesus kneeling there.

Christian Love is Steadfast

In verse one of chapter 13 we find this easily overlooked acknowledgment from

John, "...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." In the days leading up to the climactic events of that evening, Jesus continued to love His oftentimes bumbling and stumbling disciples. Many times they had disappointed and frustrated Him. Even in those last few days leading to the cross they had proved to be an additional frustration to Jesus, and they would yet disappoint Him again before it was all over. But still He loved them. Fortunately for the apostles, Jesus' love for them was not dependent upon their perfection or their performance. He did not love them *because of* who they were and what they had done. Rather, Jesus loved them *in spite of* who they were and what they had and had not done. Neither was His love for them determined by circumstances. He was patient and longsuffering, and fortunately for us, that is precisely the way Jesus loves us.

This truth holds profound implications for the way we are in turn called to love others. We so often fail to love people (serve them) because they may not be very likeable, or they fail to live up to our standards, or they have disappointed us one too many times. However, if we are to be true disciples and a true church, our love must be steadfast and unwavering, no matter how difficult people might make it for us.

Christian Love is Inclusive

Jesus continued to shuffle on his knees from one disciple to the next until Carolina Christian

He finally came to Judas. Jesus knew He was going to be betrayed and who it was that would betray Him. Utterly amazing! And totally contrary to human nature and all the norms of a self-serving society! We can only imagine the tension of the moment. Judas, looking down on the head he had betrayed for the price of a common slave. Jesus, perhaps looking up at His betrayer lovingly, yet knowingly. Dirty feet are dirty feet. Needs are needs. And love is love, regardless of the "worthiness" of its object.

In that act Jesus was saying, "If you want to be my disciples, then love *everyone*. Love those who use you. Love those who don't love you back. Love those who break your heart. Love those who don't deserve your love. *Love them all.*" Christian love would not dare to discriminate against one's enemies.

That simple act, of course, anticipated an even greater act of love that would be lifted up for all the world to see on a Roman cross. And as our mind's eye settles awestruck on that hilltop scene, the words of Jesus can be heard whispering in our ears, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

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Urgent Need!

Decisions, Decisions!.....

*d*o you agree or disagree with this statement: God wants us to maintain balance in our lives. I suppose all of us agree that God wishes for us to maintain a balanced life just as Jesus did. But just what does it mean to have balance? What would a perfectly balanced week look like for you? What are the greatest obstacles to balancing your week?

All of these questions combined with the agreed upon statement that God wants us to have balance raises another interesting question. What would a balanced life look like to God?

I know life would be simpler (and likely a lot duller) if we never had to make hard decisions in life. However, life is filled with complexity, chaos, uncertainty and many things compete for our attention. When there is a choice between two competing but equally good things, how do we decide? What has been your experience with that question? You and I (and our friends in and out of the Lord) make important decisions every day. What guides the process? How do we decide between this behavior or that behavior?

Paul sets before our brothers and sisters in Corinth some guiding principles that can be helpful in the decision making process. Before you read the text, ask yourself about how you make decisions concerning what you are going to do

Ron Newberry

when presented with choices in life. What is your base line; what is your benchmark for balance?

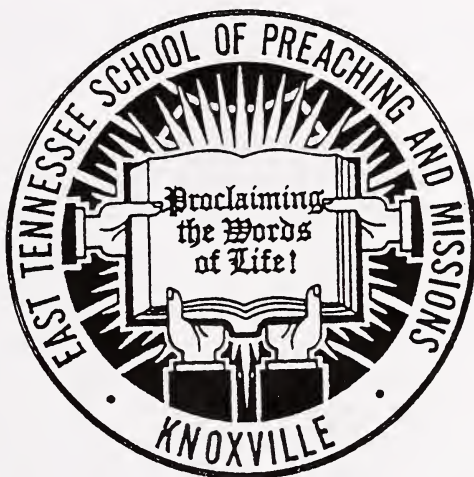
In 1 Cor. 8 and again in chapter 10, Paul expresses some very strong views about behavior out there in the world. Let us see if we can first understand the text and then look at the principles.

"Whatever brings God the most glory and other the most good, do that."

In the first instance, he discusses meat offered to idols and he discusses the choice of eating or not eating in the context of how it impacts a weaker brother. The weaker brother by Paul's definition is the one uninformed

about the gods he worshiped in his pagan life. Consequently he still struggles with his polytheism. Not all these weak brothers understood fully how Jesus fits into the scheme of things as he says in 1 Cor. 8:7.

So when faced with a choice that is going to lead this weak brother back toward idolatrous thinking, confuse his mind about Christ and put him in a position of still thinking about offering sacrifices to his former pagan gods when he eats this meat that has been offered to idols, Paul's instruction is, "Do not eat it for the sake of the weaker brother." Now there is a difference between stumbling and grumbling. Paul is not talking about someone getting his feelings hurt at this behavior. He is talking about someone losing their soul and those are two



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different things.

The second case is in 1 Cor. 10:14ff. It deals with participating in idol feasts. "Stay away from idolatry," he says. You cannot go to a pagan feast where thanks is given to a pagan god, pause during that feast and take the Lord's Supper and remain unaffected by the paganism. There is something about participating at the altar that connects one to the god he is worshiping and he cannot worship at the altar of a pagan god and take the Lord's Supper at the same time. He arouses the Lord's jealousy if he does and he has connected Christ with paganism.

The third situation follows immediately in 1 Cor. 10:23ff. You have some pagan friend who has invited you over for dinner. He sets in front of you meat that has been sacrificed to a pagan god, an idol. Go ahead and eat it without asking questions. That is one choice. However, if someone points out to you that this meat has been offered to idols, then push it away and do not eat for the sake of the conscience of the other person.

Each of these three scenarios presents the same set of choices—to eat or not to eat—all with different circumstances. In one case, Paul says it is all right to eat provided it does not destroy a brother. In the second case, he says not to eat at all. In the third instance, he says eat unless in some way it is going to offend the outsider.

Out of those three occasions, what principles do we arrive at that provide some guidance in matters of balancing

life? We need to finish reading the text. Paul's conclusion is in vv. 31-32: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God..."

So what is the overarching concern? It is not the eating and drinking per se. Paul's final arbiter is this: let the appropriate choice be governed by whether or not it will glorify God and be good for others. Whatever brings God the most glory and others the most good, do that. That is the secret to a balanced life. It takes into consideration one's relationship with God and his fellow man. Choices made on that basis will always be the right ones.

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Floyd Assistance 2000

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Christ in

Carl Etchison

Greenville, NC, continues to help the community recover from Hurricane Floyd and the resulting flooding. We have now moved into the "reconstruction" phase of our ministry and are helping Christians and other residents of our area repair their houses. In order to continue to help the victims of Floyd we seek the following assistance from other congregations.

1) Volunteers for the reconstruction projects. This includes repairing roofs, replacing dry wall, painting, insulation, electrical repair, plumbing, and HVAC systems. We need skilled workers, but will gladly take novices and pair them up as helpers with volunteers who have more experience. We will provide housing for work crews at the Roanoke Christian Service Camp in Washington, NC.

2) More Funds. We think the average cost per house for materials for needed repairs will be \$5,000-7,000. There are approximately 1,000 families in Pitt County still displaced from their homes because of flood damage. The financial relief from FEMA and the SBA has been inadequate to meet the needs of many residents. Some did not have any flood insurance.

Government and charitable programs that have provided temporary housing are limited. When those funds are gone, many people will lose their temporary quarters. Most are paying mortgages on their flooded houses plus rent on

temporary quarters! We want to help them get back into their homes as quickly as possible.

This is a great opportunity the Lord has placed before the church in Greenville in order to demonstrate that true faith is "faith that works." We need your help as soon as possible so we can keep this work moving and help as many people as possible get back into their homes.

To volunteer to help with Reconstruction, contact:

1) Mark and Laura Cremeans by e-mail at mnetchis@eastnet.educ.ecu.edu, or call 252-946-5329 (Voice) or 252-412-4963 (Cell).

2) Cliff Hollis by e-mail at hollise@mail.ecu.edu. You can also write to him at 1215 Red Banks Rd., Greenville, NC 27858. You can call him at 252-328-1160 (Voice) or 252-717-1416 (Cell).

Monetary contributions can be sent to: "Attn: Flood Relief," Church of Christ, 1706 SE Greenville Blvd., Greenville, NC 27858-4810.

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Crucified With Christ

I recently returned from my third trip to Russia, and in the course of my travels I had a most interesting experience. I rode on a train which had compartments containing four beds each, and I ended up sharing my space with three Russians. I knew very little of their language, and only one of them knew any English at all. We boarded the train at seven in the evening, and as the journey got underway, one of the Russians attempted to strike up a conversation with me. His friend joined in, and soon, the two of them were looking at me while talking and laughing. As far as my understanding what they were saying went, I might as well have been dead. Perhaps they were insulting me, but I made no response. They were truly “speaking a different language.”

On one level, I believe that is the kind of thing the apostle Paul had in mind when, in Galatians 2:20, he said, “I have been crucified with Christ.” He obviously was not talking about physical death, because he went on to talk about the life he was currently living in the flesh. He still interacted with those around him, but his desire was for that interaction to be on a different level than it had been before his “crucifixion” with Christ.

Before his death, burial, and resurrection, I was a Carolina Christian

Geoffrey Sykes

*“The old
Saul was no
more. He had
died with
Christ.”*

tion in the waters of baptism, it was Saul of Tarsus who had called the shots and made the decisions. Now it was to be Jesus. It was Christ who lived in him and gave him life. The old Saul was no more. He had died with Christ. Religious and governmental leaders could even threaten Paul (as he was now called) with the loss of his life if he continued to teach and to preach Jesus, but it did not matter because he was already “dead.” His body still lived, but now his purpose was to glorify Christ in everything his body did. That is why he could say, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

The words of the old hymn, *Buried With Christ*, reflect this thought in a wonderful way. “Buried with Christ, my blessed Redeemer, Dead to the old life of folly and sin; Satan may call, the world may entreat me, There is no voice that answers within. Dead to the world, to voices that call me, Living anew, obedient but free; Dead to the joys that once did enthrall me—Yet ‘tis not I, Christ liveth in me.” Jesus wants us to be as dead to the voices of the world as I was to the voices of my Russian traveling companions, and that can be the case if we have truly been crucified with Christ.

Now obviously, passages such as the last section of Romans 7 let us know that Paul continued to struggle with sin from

time to time. He wrote, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:18-19). What was the problem? He let his readers know in the next verse. It was "sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:20). The answer to this problem was stated in Galatians 2:20 when Paul told Peter that "Christ lives in me." Although Paul still had his battles with sin, Galatians 2:20 expressed the ideal for which he was striving: being dead to the world and alive to Christ.

Referring once again to the old hymn, "Sin hath no more its cruel dominion, Walking in newness of life, I am free. Glorious life of Christ, my Redeemer, Which He so richly shareth with me." What a wonderful gift we were offered when the Son of God freely gave His life on the cross. May we be willing to be crucified with Him as every day we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Geoffrey Sikes preaches for the Madison St. church in Clarkesville, TN. He can be contacted at 2213 Charlestown Rd., Clarkesville, TN 37043.

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Suffering With Christ.

have you ever noticed what is emphasized in the army recruitment ads you see on television? They talk about such things as travel opportunities, college tuition benefits, and job training. Have you ever noticed that they *never* say anything about the possibility of having to go to war and, perhaps, be wounded or even killed? This emphasis on the benefits of military service without a corresponding emphasis on the demands of military service produced an interesting situation during the Gulf War. It seems that there were some National Guardsmen who had to be court-martialed because they refused to go to war. Their only defense was that they had joined the Guard for the benefits, not to go to war!

While it may seem strange that anyone would join the military for the benefits without considering the possibility of having to go to war, I would suggest to you that it happens all the time in the Lord's army. How many times do you see Christians who abandon their faith as a result of "hurt feelings"? How many times do you hear of Christians who forsake their place in the assembly because "they're not getting anything out of it"? How many times do you find Christians expressing displeasure over appeals for money, or the length of the sermon? How many times do you find Christians abandoning their post on Sunday when faced with the opportunity to be somewhere else doing something

Paul Jarrett

they find more pleasurable? How many times do we see

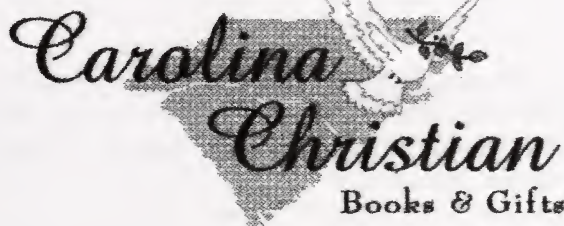
Christians engaging in the same conduct we see all around us in the world (divorce, sexual immorality, covetousness, etc.) when faced with the challenge of saying "no" to temptation?

Perhaps we need to reconsider the "recruitment ad" which was used by the Commander-in-Chief of the Lord's army. When Jesus talked about discipleship in Luke 14, He did not focus on the benefits. Rather, he encouraged would-be recruits to count the cost. When the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about being a soldier in the Lord's army, he spoke of the challenge of "suffering hardship" (2 Timothy 2:3). When he wrote to the church at Philippi, he spoke of the privilege of not only believing in Christ, but also suffering for His sake (Philippians 1:29-30). Paul reminded them of the conflict which they had seen in him, which had led to the birth of this church (see Acts 16). He also pointed to the suffering they were continuing to see in him as he wrote to them from a Roman prison.

If the church is going to grow in this millennium, we cannot have soldiers of Christ who are in the Lord's army only "for the benefits." We must have soldiers who realize they have been called to fight a common foe. We have been called to follow in the footsteps of Christ, whose example was one of suffering (1 Peter

(continued on page 14)

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A Crisis in Preaching

Many would agree with the statement, "Preaching is not what it used to be." Preaching is changing just as our world is changing. What is appropriate in the pulpit? What is effective? What is proper?

Robert Young

worlds." Humanity can participate in the divine nature because in Christ Jesus Deity has shared our humanity. Proper preaching must ever have that truth about Jesus Christ at its core. In the words of Ignatius, preaching must "consider the times, and then look to the Timeless One."

A Crisis: Method or Message?

The crisis in preaching to which I refer is not in methods. This crisis centers on the message, or rather on communicating the message in understandable, applicable terms to our contemporary world. We must ask, "What message must be preached? How can one connect God and Scripture to life in our world?" John Stott's description is accurate: preachers face the challenge of bridging "between two

A Brief Survey of Preaching Methods

Historically, separating the message from the method has been difficult. In the early days of the Restoration Movement, preaching was usually linear and rational. Preaching sought mental understanding and assent. Frontier people seeking literacy appreciated

(continued from page 12)

2:21). The fellowship of His suffering will be experienced when we suffer harsh treatment while doing what is right (1 Peter 2:20); when we are slandered for doing what is right (1 Peter 3:16-17); when we cease from sin and suffer the derision of those who choose to continue in sin (1 Peter 4:4); and when we are tested by Satan and derided for our commitment to doing God's will in a wicked and perverse world (1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:8-10).

I have often made the statement that the preacher who is seeking a problem-free church does not really want to minister. I say that because ministry in God's sight involves serving those with Carolina Christian

problems. Jesus' example of service involved taking on the grief and sorrow of those whom He served (Isaiah 53:4). The apostle Paul saw his responsibility as that of being a participant in the suffering of Christ on behalf of others (2 Corinthians 4:11). If we are going to experience the benefit of His resurrection, we must also be willing to experience "the fellowship of His suffering" (Philippians 3:10-11).

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topical, sequential arrangements of biblical material. Texts from a variety of locations in Scripture were introduced to provide a broad view of a particular topic.

By the middle of this century, a shift in homiletics (the study of preaching) was encouraging an expository approach to Scripture. The topical method asked "What can I say?" based on the needs and understandings of the audience, and generally depended on the authority of the preacher. The expository method supposed to ask "What does the text say?" If in the latter the Bible was primary and authority resided in the text, both approaches tended to rummage through the text for their messages, and both approaches often ended with sermons divorced from the life settings of the hearers.

To properly expose the text is no easy matter and many preachers, following the verse by verse approach of our adult Bible classes, did it poorly. Soon an alternative question was posed as the solution to the problem of preaching: "What can I say that is interesting and that somehow connects with the text?" The biblical text became a sort of springboard. Much of my early preaching was of this kind. The authority in this kind of preaching again resides primarily in the preacher.

Along the way, preaching's struggle with understanding the text has led to searches for the author's intention and studies in historical, grammatical, and

literary backgrounds.

A better question for sermon preparation is: "What does the text say that I must say?" What are its underlying theological motifs?

Finding an Effective Method For Modern Preaching

When one struggles with these sorts of questions, one comes face to face both with what the text says and with how the text says it. Does the modern church need only to understand the Psalms and be able to remember their content, or is there an appropriate way to experience the Psalms? The move from the age of the printed page to the electronic age should influence preaching. Preaching which is insensitive to a visually-oriented, experientially-oriented audience will dwindle in relevance.

When one finds Jesus telling a story, can (or should) one tell that story (or a similar one) to elicit a similar impact and response, or does one merely seek to help hearers understand what is occurring historically? How is God's Word preached in our world so the message can be heard, understood, and applied?

The answer to that question will depend upon the preacher, the audience, and the text for the sermon. God's message to his creation is communicated in various ways in Scripture. A place exists for parabolic preaching, for narrative preaching, for topical strategies that meaningfully approach the text, for sermons that allow the hearers to

experience afresh the impact of Biblical poetry, instruction, prophecy, or homily, and therein to hear the message anew. Despite the disdain of some, inductive sermon approaches are not automatically "unsound." Not every person in our society learns deductively, and preachers who preach only deductively often (unknowingly) practice selective evangelism and ministry.

Inappropriate Methods

Even when the message is right, some methods are inappropriate, ineffective, and even unethical.

(1) Moralistic preaching proclaims the "what" without the "why." It tells us what to do for God before it tells what God has done for us. It is based more often in judgment than in God's kindness. It gives imperative without the instruction and in so doing ignores the usual approach of Scripture. It is prescriptive without the description. In the words of the Hebrews, it gives the *halakkah* (instruction) without the *haggadah* (story). This kind of preaching may convince someone to act, but it has little staying power.

(2) Authority from the preacher. Regardless of the method chosen, authority for the sermon must always issue from the text. Meaningful applications of the text to the lives of today's hearers. The problem with preacher authority is that when another preacher with seemingly greater personal authority (charisma?) comes along, the hearer may be swept away.

(3) Irrelevant preaching. One sitting in auditoriums across our brotherhood for consecutive Sundays could hardly miss the fact that many sermons begin in Scripture, end in Scripture, and never hit life. We too often persist in addressing boring, irrelevant issues from our pulpits while hurting people are dying for a word from God that speaks to life. Preachers would do well in sermon preparation to consider every potential group in their audience, and ask what part of the chosen text will address what issues in the lives of this group. There is no excuse for irrelevant preaching.

(4) Unprepared or unplanned preaching. Effective preaching is not a one-time event any more than receiving physical nourishment can be accomplished annually. Preaching must go somewhere. It must have an aim, a purpose, a goal. Those who would sit at the weekly feast where the "Bread of Life" is broken deserve variety, balance, nourishment and sustenance appropriate to life's demands, seasoning and spice. Those who hear us deserve the best study of the text and its application to the life of the local church that we can provide.

May God assist those of us who preach in being good stewards of our gifts and our opportunities.

Robert Young serves as Executive Vice-President at Ohio Valley College in Parkersburg, WV, and is also Director of the Bible Program. This article originally appeared on the OVC website (www.ovccollege.edu/index.htm) and is used by permission.

..... Stupid or Courageous?

t

hat's the question our Sunday school

David Kneip

Have you ever been in a situation like that? Have

class took up a couple of weeks ago. I listed some actions, and we discussed whether they which category they should fall into.

Some were obviously stupid (here's hoping you agree!): sticking one's hand

in a blender, walking on hot coals, showing up for football practice without a football helmet. Others, though, were a little more difficult to determine.

What would you say to bungee jumping? How about going out for bean burritos on a first date? I suppose it depends on your perspective.

It was funny, though. Our class was pretty talkative about issues like the ones above. They got quiet, though, when I started mentioning things like standing up for your beliefs and being a friend to someone who isn't very popular. It's kind of scary to think about those things. What would you do if you were faced with such a situation? Now, granted, we don't normally face the decisions some early Christians did: turn away from Jesus, or be eaten by the lions! What we do face, though, is the potential for embarrassment, ridicule, and even abandonment by people close to us if we do things that aren't very popular.

you ever been asked a question point-blank, and it felt like your whole world rode on your decision? Maybe somebody

asked you why you've decided not to drink alcohol or why you "waste" all your time at church.

"Can you stand up for what is right?"

Your palms get sweaty, your heart races, and no matter how long you wait to answer, it still feels like you didn't have enough time.

Right then, at that very moment, you're faced with a huge task: can you be courageous enough to do what you've decided to do? Can you stand up for what is right? I know that y'all face those kind of things pretty often; I still do. And it doesn't get much easier. Let me pass on a little trick of the trade, though. It's a picture of a friend of mine that helps me out in a time like that.

This guy was a church-goer, and he had a strong sense of what God wanted him to do in life. The problem was, he didn't want to do it much because he knew that he was going to have to die for God's sake. He cried out, he tried in vain to get his friends to help him, but in the end, he told God, "Not what I will, but what you will." If you read Mark 14:32-42, you'll see my friend there. But it's

not while Jesus was praying that he can help us out here directly.

You see, the very next story, when Judas came with the mob, is the real deal in our situation. What did Jesus do? Did he strike everybody blind and run away? Did he try to take care of things by force, the way Peter did? Did he just slip through the crowd, as he had done on other occasions? Did he call down angels from heaven to protect him? The answer to all of these is "No." Because he believed that what he was doing was

worth the cost, he didn't fight. He stood up for what he knew was the right thing to do.

I hope that that picture of Jesus can strengthen you as you fight for the kingdom. However, I'd like to help out, if I could. In this column I'd like to address some of the things you are dealing with, but I need you to help me. Please feel free to email me at dck99a@acu.edu or to write to 141 College Dr., Abilene, TX 79601. I do want to hear from you so that we can all grow together in our love for God and our service in His kingdom.

BROTHERHOOD NEWS

— Mark Hudson

MARION, NC...

The Carolina Lectures, 2000, will be hosted by the Marion Church of Christ, April 2-6. The theme of this year's lecture program is "The Works of the Flesh Versus the Fruit of the Spirit." For more details call (828) 652-3605.

WILMINGTON, NC...

The Pine Valley Church of Christ in Wilmington will

host Paul Faulkner and Carl Brecheen in their live Marriage Enrichment Seminar April 14-15, 2000.

BLACK MOUNTAIN, NC...

The Blue Ridge Encampment will mark it's 50th anniversary June 5-9, 2000. Joe Roberts, minister for the North Blvd. Church of Christ in Murfreesboro, TN, is the

Director. For information, call (615) 893-1520.

YADKINVILLE, NC...

The 14th annual Small Church Workshop will be hosted by the Yadkinville Church of Christ, May 25-26, 2000. The theme of this year's workshop is "The Community of Faith." For more information call the church office at (336) 679-8924.

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...The Many Faces of Passion

this is the month we celebrate Valentine's Day. Sweethearts everywhere celebrate their love for one another. God has created us with an attraction that matures in love for the opposite sex. Those desires have their natural and godly fulfillment in marriage (1 Corinthians 7:9).

Tim Sensing

act. Their hearts are stirred, they claim to be moved,

Yet, passion is often bent out of shape by the selfishness of our lusts and carnal desires. Further, our passions are often directed toward things rather than people. One may have a passion for music, cars, fame, photography, old movies, cooking and anything else under the sun. Having a passion for life, enjoying the gifts of God, is a blessing. These passions can be channeled in a wholesome way. They can also be left uncontrolled to our folly. Saul had such a passion. He enthusiastically pursued his passion with all the energy within him. He says, "Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them," (Acts 26:11). However, when Saul saw the light, he repented. His passions changed. As a Christian he then gave his fullest energies passionately to serve Christ.

What is your passion? What is the driving force of your life? As I look around this small world I see many whose passions are misdirected and corrupt. But I also see something else. I see people living lives detached from any feeling or belief. They have no passions or convictions. Nothing moves them. They may wish the plight of unborn babies murdered daily were different, but they do not

but they continue their bland routines as though abortion didn't matter.

I see Christians who say "Amen" at the call to discipleship. They support with a few dollars that which is done in the name of evangelism or benevolence. Yet, there is little passion. The car salesman has more conviction that his coupe will satisfy your longings than do many Christians who worship the author of Life. To be a good salesman, you need to be either a good actor or truly believe in the product. In the church, both actors and believers exist side by side.

However, there is a third category—lifeless, unfeeling, unmoving, cold and passionless routine attender. They can't be stirred with a stick. Sadder still, they can't be stirred by the gospel either.

What do you believe in? What is there in your life worth dying for? Do you have a passion, an obsession, a fervent zeal for anything?

Passion also has another side. Definition 10 in the *Random House Dictionary* states, "The state of being acted upon or affected by something external." This is the reason many describe the crucifixion of Jesus as passion. The sufferings of Christ on the cross is the passion of Christ. That is why Paul often talked about sharing in the sufferings of Christ: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead," (Philippians 3:10-12).

Think about that the next time you're lying on your couch.

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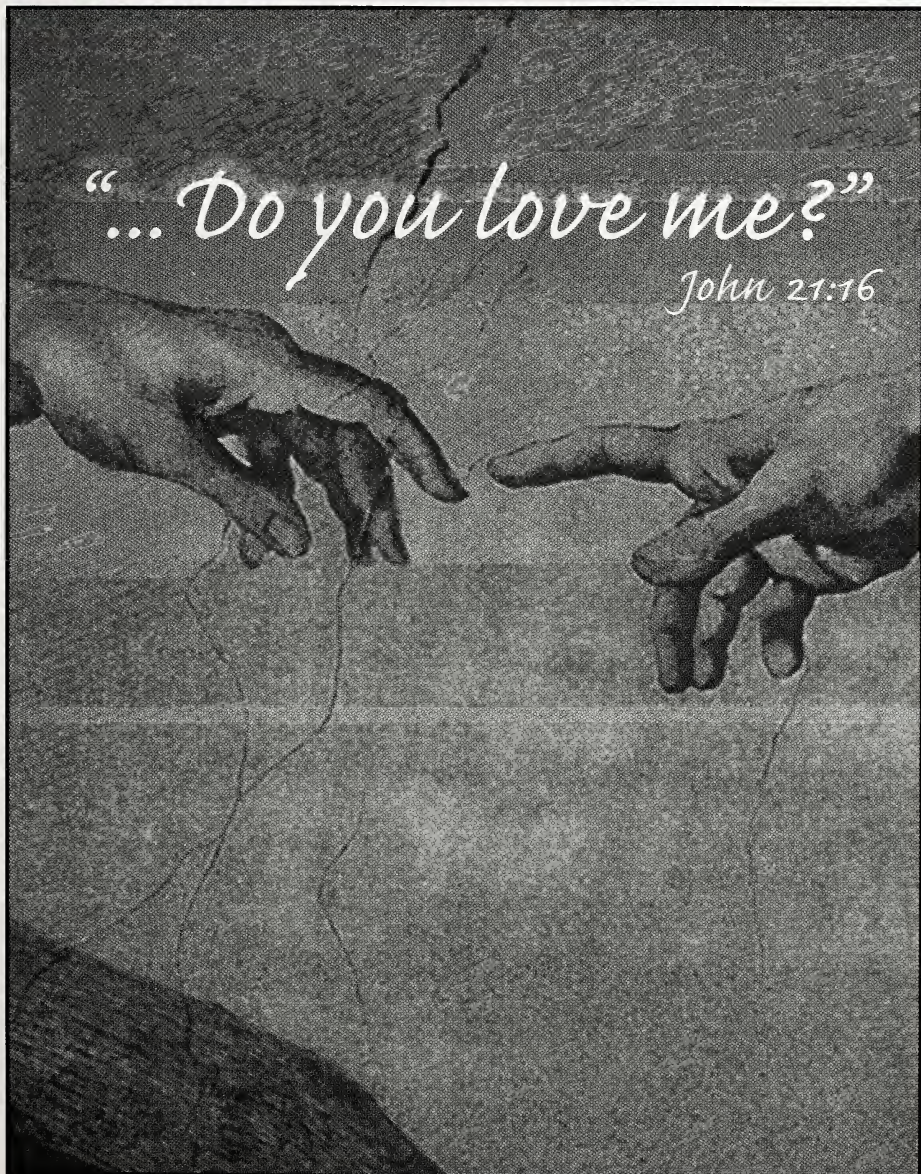
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knowledge is unsurpassed
and who's faithfulness is

tion 3:14-22) was a seemingly blessed church. It was wealthier than most and did not have to put up with the struggles that troubled many of the churches of that day. As a matter of fact, everything seemed quite peaceful and prosperous in the church. All the bills were paid, the membership was composed of highly respected citizens, and things were moving along nicely—not spectacularly, but nicely. However, the church in Laodicea was in fact dealing with a serious and potentially deadly spiritual problem. Laodicea's battles did not consist of confronting the synagogue of Satan, the Roman government or false teachers. Rather, their spiritual battle raged within their own hearts and their enemy was not quite so obvious as those that threatened some of the other churches Jesus wrote to in Asia Minor.

Laodicea was a church that could easily be mistaken for most churches in America today. It was respected, prosperous, peaceful...and totally unexcited about its faith. More than any of the other churches Jesus wrote to, Laodicea is the most representative of the state of the church in America today: lukewarm. Therein laid her sin.

As the church gathered to hear the reading of the letter that had just been received from Jesus by way of John the apostle, what might they have been thinking? What might they have been anticipating from the Lord who is trustworthy and reliable; the Lord whose

unquestioned? They were a wealthy church, complete with all the trappings of success and faithfulness. Perhaps they were even a respectable church that was well thought of in the community. Could it be that he was writing to congratulate them!

What they received was one of the strongest rebukes of any of the seven letters to the Asia Minor churches. "I know your deeds," he began. That is, Christ sees all and knows all about his people. He possesses intimate knowledge of his churches. And just what did those deeds suggest? "You are neither cold nor hot...you are lukewarm." Neither cold nor hot. Just lukewarm. Well, isn't that better than being cold? Jesus says, no. At least those who reject the gospel, or even oppose it, have some real convictions. They have made their position clear. And those who are hot, well, there is no questioning their conviction about Christ either. But lukewarm...that's the worst.

The believers in Laodicea had not rejected their faith in Christ, but neither were they enthused and excited about their faith. They were simply *indifferent* to the gospel. Dale Johnson writes, "Lukewarmness is a matter of yawning in Christ's face. It's the sin of being bored with Jesus."

The problem with lukewarmness is that it is completely lacking in passion. Jesus actually preferred rejection of the faith to the kind of faith the Laodiceans had. How could that be? Because passionless faith—lukewarmness—is much more

difficult to overcome than alienation from or hostility to Christ. The fact is, it is easier to get an alien sinner to radically change his or her entire life than it is to get a lukewarm, indifferent Christian to make even a minor change. Hostility is always easier to overcome than indifference.

What is the greatest danger facing the church today?

False teachers?

Sectarians? Liberals?

Legalists? In my

estimation and

experience, perhaps

the greatest danger

facing the church

today is passionless

faith. Lukewarmness. It is so dangerous

because it is so subtle...and so accepted.

All across our land our congregations

engage in passionless worship. Member-

ship rolls shrink or stagnate because there

is no passion for lost souls. A decaying

culture is left un-encountered because the

comfort and ease of the status quo

requires less. And on those few occasions

when our passions are stirred for a

moment, it is not so much that they are

stirred *for* God as they are often stirred *against* someone or something else.

We talk about being patterned after

the church of the New Testament, but

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“Lukewarmness
is a matter
of yawning
in Christ’s
face.”

who, or what, are most of us patterned after? The persecuted Jerusalem brethren who shared Christ everywhere they went after being driven from their homes? The

young Thessalonian believers, of whom Paul said, “For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth...” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Sadly, too many of us—collectively and individually—have settled into the pattern of the Laodicean church.

We need not think

for a moment that Christ will long tolerate our lukewarmness, our passionless faith. He would not tolerate it in Laodicea—so why do we think he will tolerate it in us? The image that Jesus used was strong, even revolting, “I will spit you out of my mouth.” Literally, “I will vomit you out of my mouth.” Certainly not the stuff of polite conversation, but then again, He didn’t mean for it to be. Jesus wants us to be revolted by the image; He wants us to be sickened by the very things that sickened him.

But are we?

“Why don’t you deal more with the



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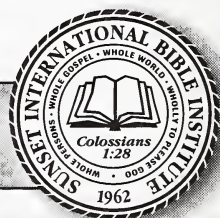
issues troubling the church today?" someone asks. Well, I beg your forgiveness if my perspective regarding issues is different than yours, but is there any greater issue than this one of lukewarm churches and Christians? Is there any more sinister danger than that of churches that look respectable on the outside, but on the inside have no heart, no passion for Christ? Is there anything more despicable than Christians and churches that are bored with Christ and His cross? Perhaps if we devoted as much time and energy to attacking the problem of lukewarmness as we do each other we just might see a spark of passion ignited in the hearts of many.

Dear Father, Holy God, we beseech you, we beg you to forgive us. Forgive our coldness, our complacency, our boredom with you, our lukewarmness. May your Spirit convict us of our sin and ignite in our hearts a passion for You, a passion in which we give ourselves completely to your service and will. Father, may our spiritual yawning be stifled and may we be awakened with a zeal that burns so brightly that the darkness of the world will never quench it. Help us to see ourselves as we really are and to see Christ as our only hope. We bow before you in His name. Amen.

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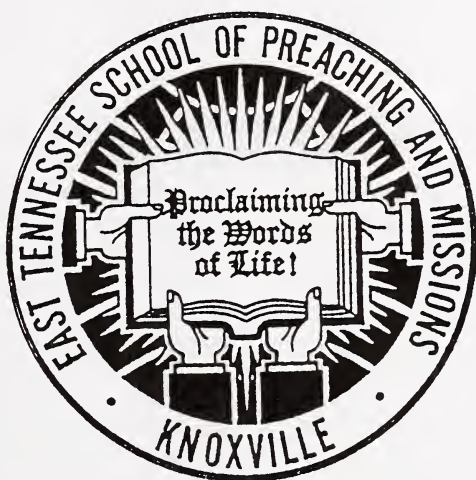
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Prepared?

There are a lot of folks around the country who should be feeling kind of foolish these days. Here we are nearly 90 days into the new millennium, and still no catastrophic, cataclysmic events that I've heard of. The Y2K bug seems to have been squashed. A minor glitch here and a small problem there appears to be the extent of the problems suffered even in the countries around the world that don't have the level of expertise we have had in order to solve the bug problem.

Did you hear, as I did, some of the dire predictions of how the world as we know it was would come to an end? There were even some predictions that Jesus was going to come again and the millennial reign would begin. I wonder how they are going to explain their inability to predict the future?

When will the prognosticators and so-called prophets among us listen to simple truth? Jesus makes it abundantly clear in Mark 13:32, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." If Jesus Himself did not know when the end would come, why would anyone trust a mere mortal?

Having said that, no one should be lulled into thinking that Jesus is not ever going to return. That would be an even bigger mistake. Peter warns us in 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (some manuscripts say, "be burned up"). The fact that men cannot predict when He will come doesn't

Ron Newberry

mean He is not coming back. Every indication is that He will return when we least expect it. Everything will seem normal.

This means that instead of saying that the time when He could return is past, we ought to be even more vigilant. For many, the worst case scenario would be for the Lord to return and bring the curtain down on the world. For the Christian, I cannot think of a better scenario. All the hurting and suffering, all the abuse and pain, all the injustice and criminal activity will be history. Nothing but joy and comfort awaits those who die in the Lord or who are alive when He returns.

There's one point about which we need to be certain. If we intend to *die* in the Lord, then we need to have *lived* in the Lord. You cannot die in North Carolina if you are not in North Carolina while you're alive. If you are to die in the Lord, then you must be in the Lord while you are alive. That should be our ultimate concern.

Did it hurt to get prepared for the Y2K bug? Probably not. Sure, there was a lot of money spent on supplies and other preparations, but in the final analysis it was better to be prepared and there not to have been a major ordeal than for the reverse to have happened. One thinks for sure: it is always best to be prepared for the real end of the world. One cannot make too much preparation spiritually for when Jesus returns. I hope this serves as a true warning about getting and staying ready for that great day.

Come Lord Jesus!

Road Rage

My brother

David Kneip

is an email fanatic; he spends hours on the Internet. Maybe some of you can relate.

Not long ago, he met a girl online who had some questions about lots of things, God chief of all. As her story unfolded, it turned out that in past years her parents had been involved with some cults, maybe with some Satanic influences. Her father had abused her when she was little, in part sexually. Her parents had divorced, but she is still scarred emotionally. Consequently, she had some confused notions about who God is.

As they talked, my brother began to explain prayer to her. She couldn't believe that God would actually want to listen to her, that he cared about her. She wondered if she needed to pray out loud so that God could hear her better. She wasn't sure if God could listen to her talk honestly about her emotions because some of them were pretty violent.

I'm not sure about you, but I have some fairly violent emotions, too. We Christians are pretty good at hiding our big emotions, but we still have them. Have you ever gotten so mad at someone you literally thought you might scream? Have you ever been so sad that you just lost it, weeping uncontrollably? Anybody ever heard of road rage? In those times I want to follow what the apostle Paul says, to "pray without ceasing," but I don't know if God wants to hear me say the kinds of things that I'm feeling. I

wonder if he'd rather hear some polite praises or thanksgivings with an "In Jesus' name, Amen" tacked onto the end.

Psalm 137 addresses this situation. It's not a pretty psalm. It's what we call a lament—the writer pours his heart out to God, trusting all along that God is in charge and is sovereign over whatever the situation is. And this psalm contains some of the most violent language in the entire Bible, straight from the heart of a believer!

The setting of the psalm is in the exile in Babylon. The writer of this psalm might have been a singer or musician in the temple. Since the Babylonians burned the temple to the ground, not only was the writer without a home, he was without a job! The people who had captured them would mock them, poking fun and asking these musicians to sing one of the songs from the temple. How, the writer asks, can we sing the songs of Jerusalem, of *God*, in a foreign place?

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The very last verse is the crux of the psalm for me: "Happy [or Blessed] shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock." Whoa, there. I was identifying with the writer for a while. All through the middle of the psalm, the writer bargains with God, he pleads with God, he weeps before God, and that's understandable. But now, here at the end, when most psalms say something like, "But I trust you, God, because you are the king of the world," the writer tells God he wants to take an innocent Babylonian baby and smash its head against a rock! This man, who every Passover remembers the Exodus, when the Israelites escaped from a Pharaoh who had killed thousands of innocent Hebrew babies, wants to kill a few infants of his own. It doesn't sound very...Christian, does it?

You know what, though? For over two thousand years, that verse has been in the Bible. Nobody ever took it out. When they got the Psalms together, they left it in. When the early church added the New Testament onto the Old, they didn't eliminate this verse, even though it seems to violate the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. There may be several reasons, but let me propose one to you: God wants to hear our deepest emotions. He can take it. He's powerful enough to deal with our darkest secrets, and He is strong enough to change us into the likeness of Jesus, no matter what we look like right now. God desires a relationship with us, and he doesn't want us to hide anything from him, no matter how

Carolina Christian

ashamed of it we may be.

Whatever you're dealing with, offer it to God. I can't guarantee that things will get better from your perspective. Prayer is not a magic spell or an automatic problem-solver; it's a relationship-builder.

The girl my brother was talking to—God can handle her situation. And he can handle yours

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..... Absolute and Exclusive

Danny Boggs

for years now our culture has been diving deeper and deeper into a sea of relativity, an environment where nothing is absolutely true; where the trivial and what really matters are indistinguishable. *The U.S. News and World Report* (August 30, 1999) gives an example and assessment of where we are:

“Colleges are increasingly offering ‘junk courses.’ Examples from current curricula include ‘The Physics, History, and Technique of Juggling,’ ‘The Slavic Vampire,’ and ‘The Biology of ER’ (the television series). John Leo offers this explanation of the phenomenon: ‘The junk courses creep in because much of the professoriate now believes that nothing can truly be known, so nothing truly matters. From this it follows that juggling, horror movies, and serious courses all have equal claims on students’ attention...The academy today is obsessed with the trivial and trashy, relentlessly focused on sexual politics and gripped by a deep antagonism that has degenerated into a new absolutism.’”

Responding in Romans 1 to the thrust of a similar culture, Paul said that fools who thought themselves wise rejected what they new about God and made gods of themselves. They became “futile in their hearts and their foolish thoughts were

darkened. They exchanged the truth of God for the lie. Consequently, God’s wrath was against them.

If our culture continues to become increasingly relativistic, then we must intensify our personal grasp of and our commitment to sharing the absolute and exclusive truth of God’s word.

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all...” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).
“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Danny Boggs ministers to the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville, NC. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

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It's a Matter of The Heart

We all
struggle with

Tim Kraus

pay the price for our
law-breaking. He made

the urge to do what we know is wrong. It sometimes feels like a war within, this temptation to rebel. Must it continue forever with such intensity? Is there a way to victory?

Some have insisted that submitting to a heavy burden of regulations is the way to control these tendencies to sin. They make intricate rule-keeping the test of salvation. Such an approach promises purity, but only delivers despair.

Layers of rules which demand, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" are too often "based on human commands and appearances of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:23). No one can live up to his own expectations, let alone someone else's. So, the legal approach to Christianity must be rejected for its inability to supply power over sin.

But there is a way, and it's the best way.

Aware of our shortcomings and sins, God provided the Christ to

justification available to us through faith in His Son. No longer must we be fearful of Hell as we consider our own weaknesses, for salvation is based upon the goodness of the Savior.

This system alone makes a pure life possible. No longer must we struggle with "someone else's" law, but God's standards have become ours. Instead of laws etched on stone, we receive God's promise: "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Hebrews 8:10).

God desires to transform our insides instead of simply forcing our outsides to conform to regulations. Far from giving license to sin, this provides us with the personal relationship with our holy God that we so dearly need. Only through this closeness of fellowship with Christ can we develop the "want to" to live right.

Then, we can win the battle against sin—from the inside out!

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Unfinished Business:

Editor's Note: The following article was originally a speech presented by Paul Watson for the Elders/Deacons/Preachers Dinner at the Abilene Christian University Lectures on February 22, 2000. Due to the length of the speech, portions have been edited to fit our format. In this article brother Watson presents all church leaders with a relevant and practical challenge. We thought it well worth sharing with our readers.

Paul Watson

In Mark's account of a very familiar story (Mark 12:28-34), a Jewish theologian approached Jesus with a question: "Of all the

commandments, which is the most important?" You know what Jesus replied: "The most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

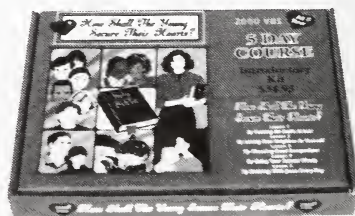
The theologian agreed completely, repeating Jesus' reply and adding, "[this] is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." To which Jesus in turn responded, "You are not far from

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Challenges for the New Millennium

the kingdom of God.”

I propose to you tonight that our “unfinished business” as we enter a new millennium (or, for the purists among us, as we *prepare* to enter the new millennium) is simply this: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. I am not suggesting that this is “unfinished business” because we have failed to love God and each other in the past—although, my own failings in this regard are painful to recollect. I am suggesting that this will *always* be “unfinished business”—kingdom business, our Father’s business, the business we are to be about “until kingdom come.”

The God who himself exists in relationship—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—created us to live in relationship with him and with one another:

As those who live in a personal, trusting, responsively obedient relationship with him (Genesis 1 and 2);

As those who live in a loving, mutually supportive relationship with each other—with our spouses (Genesis 2), with our families (Exodus 20, the fifth commandment), with our covenant partners—those with whom we share a “like precious faith” (Exodus 20, commands six through ten; 2 Peter 1:1), with all the “strangers” whose paths we cross daily (Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Luke 10:30-37), even with our enemies (Exodus 23:4-5; Matthew 5:43-48).

To live, or to try to live, independently—on our own, apart from God

and one another—is neither God’s work nor God’s will. *Alienation*, in whatever form it takes (self-absorption, self-righteousness, competition, avoidance, or even benign neglect) is Satan’s goal. The goal of the gospel is *reconciliation*—with God and with each another. “My prayer is...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:20-22). It is this never-ending, always “unfinished” business of reconciliation—the ongoing renewal of our relationships with God and with one another—to which I would direct us tonight.

Living With God and Neighbor

One striking characteristic of our Lord was his constant awareness of God, his devotion to his heavenly father. “Didn’t you know that I must be about my father’s business?...If this is how God clothes the grass of the field, will he not much more clothe you?...Don’t call me ‘good’; God alone is ‘good’...Father, if it’s possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but yours be done...Father, forgive them, for they don’t know that they’re doing...Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

As those who have been called to serve the Lord’s people in special ways, how is our relationship—*my* relationship—with God? Is prayer a formality for us; or is it an urgent, daily necessity? I know as well as anyone how easy it is to neglect prayer when faced with all the “busy-ness” of life. But I also recall

Martin Luther's saying how, on a given day, he had so much to do that he had to get up an hour early for extra time to pray. How carefully do we *listen* to God? How personally do we take what is said in his word? Do we hear those words as first of all directed *to* us and only then *through* us? Our people hunger for a closer relationship with God. We will best help them satisfy that hunger by sharing with them our own burning desire to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

When it comes to our interpersonal relationships, think again of Jesus and how he loved his "neighbors," how he was for them and with them in every situation of life. Recall that day when Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' home for dinner, a mealtime so rich in personal acceptance and honest spiritual self-assessment that it changed Zacchaeus' life entirely. Think of Jesus at another dinner party at the home of Simon the Pharisee (have you noticed how much of Jesus' life and teaching involved food and meals?) and how Jesus so readily, so comfortably accepted the ointment, and the tears, of the woman who anointed his feet. Or recall that day when Jesus himself wept with Mary and Martha over the death of their brother Lazarus.

As elders, deacons, preachers, to "love our neighbors" surely means to share ourselves with them and to allow them to share their lives with us. Yet it is so easy to overlook people. We get so caught up in making budgets, planning programs,

managing staff, producing the weekly bulletin that we lose sight of the very ones that we want to serve. Never have I been so aware of my own myopia as regards my neighbor as I was that Sunday morning about ten years ago when, with my associate minister, I sat in my office and listened to three single mothers explain what it was like to be overlooked in our church. Not deliberately neglected and certainly not mistreated; just overlooked. "Do you know," one asked, "what it is like to hear separate church activities announced for elementary, middle school and high school kids for the same weekend, knowing that it is logistically and financially impossible to have your own children participate, and not to have a single person—leader, member, whoever—ask if you needed any help?" "Do you know," asked another, "what it is like to take your children to the mall and help them pick out your own Christmas gift?" I didn't know, then; I do, now, because three women risked shame and disapproval to share themselves with us.

The best thing we can do for our people is to be with them in every aspect of their lives and ours. We can share their hurts and griefs: in a hospital room or beside an open grave, when a job is lost or a spouse leaves or a child rebels. And we can celebrate the good times of life together: weddings and births, birthdays and graduations. "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." At other times just "being there" is

enough—in the foyer, at the cafeteria, in the stands at a ball game, on a work detail at the church building.

Sometimes we need to create intentional opportunities to share with our brothers and sisters. Each year my fellow elders and I try to visit personally with each individual, couple and family in our congregation to talk with them about their spiritual health. You might think, as I did initially, that members would feel uncomfortable with these visits. On the contrary, they welcome them. And we always need to be with each other in prayer. The most important thing we do as elders each year at our elders' retreat is to pray together for each member of the flock by name, with specific requests to God on their behalf.

We elders, deacons, and preachers are also "neighbors" one of another. We don't always think in those terms, I'm afraid. Often we think of the corporate model of a board of directors, middle management, and the hired help. We *are* neighbors; we need to behave as neighbors one to another. As elders, do we look after the lives of our preachers and their families? Do we offer a frequent word of encouragement to the preacher or ask his wife how *her* life is going? Preachers, do we seek out our deacons and elders to share their burdens with them? Who notices and responds to the deacon who is clearly overwhelmed by the task assigned to him? To the elder whose diminishing capacities are affecting his service? To the preacher whose compulsive spending habits are threaten-

ing both his family and his ministry?

A Special Challenge of Neighbor-Love

Which leads me to perhaps our most delicate challenge in trying to discharge our neighbor-love responsibilities to our brothers and sisters, and that is to be compassionately interventional in their lives when such intervention is desperately needed. You can think of many examples of sordid sin or divisive behavior that must be addressed quickly, firmly and lovingly. Let me share with you a less obvious example that happened to me when I was in my first full-time preaching appointment in New Haven, Connecticut. My wife and I at the time had three small children, ages one, two, and five. We were doing our best to rear them properly. We were very strict with them and we insisted on a very high level of controlled behavior at all times. This meant that during almost every service my wife would go out with the two-year-old, or the five-year-old, or both, and not "spare the rod," so to speak. Finally—mercifully!—the wife of one of our elders, as kind and gentle a person as I have ever known, intervened and said to my wife, "Dear, you're trying too hard. Those children are too young yet to do all that you're asking of them." It turned our child-rearing around, improved my wife's disposition greatly, even helped my preaching. All because this mild, sweet woman stepped in to help us by correcting us, in love.

It is my impression that over the past

decade or two we have become less impersonal, less authoritarian and more sensitive, more compassionate in our leadership. If so, well and good. But I also suspect that we may now imagine that “compassion” precludes “confrontation” and that discipline should be avoided lest we injure someone’s self-esteem. We need to be reminded, as Will Willimon put it, “that you have not said ‘salvation’ when you say ‘self-esteem’.” When needed, repentance and redirection of life are a healthy tonic for self-esteem.

Recall Jesus’ encounter with the “rich young ruler” (Mark 10:17-22). This “good” man came to Jesus seeking approval and “unqualified acceptance” and, on one level, Jesus gave him that. But, by way of doing pastoral care for this man, Jesus also challenged him to move on to a more radical reorientation of life—a move the man was unwilling to make, at least at that moment. Was Jesus less than caring or compassionate in confronting the man in this way? Not at all; the text says that Jesus “loved” him. As Walter Brueggemann observes, what Jesus offered him was “uncompromising truth—telling about the shape of well-being, spoken in love.”

Conclusion

On the back of an envelope that came to me in the mail from a financial institution were these words: CHASE: The right relationship is everything.” Isn’t it strange how the “children of this

age” are often so much more insightful than the “children of light”? This bank’s slogan is actually copyrighted; it is their trademark. But God said it first: “Love me totally, unreservedly; love each other as you love yourselves.” It is not always easy. Some of our “neighbors” are not that easy to love, and even when we are devoted to God and truly desire to love others, we never seem to have enough time or spiritual energy to give to our “neighbors” what they want and need from us. But loving God and neighbor is not impossible. With the help of God’s Spirit, given us at our baptism, we can grow in this grace. We do not have to do everything—we are not supposed to do everything—ourselves.

In an article entitled “Preaching into the Next Millennium,” Barbara Brown Taylor reminds preachers that our “business is relationship, which does not stop with relating individuals to God. Our good news is that God has related us to one another and the least act of love has infinite consequences.” Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” Unhesitatingly he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.”

That is our “unfinished business” for this—for any—millennium.

Paul Watson serves the Cole Mill Rd. church in Durham, NC, as an elder and preacher. He can be contacted at 1617 Cole Mill Rd., Durham, NC 27705.

RALEIGH, NC...

The *Rochester Heights church of Christ* will host its eleventh annual Woman's Day on April 1, 2000. The theme is "Let Us Rise Up and Build," with guest speakers *Rikki Fuller, Alinda Gadson, Angela McCants* and *Mildred McDade*. The program will be held at the building of the Brooks Ave. church in

Raleigh. For more information call (919) 821-2400.

MARION, NC...

The 56th Annual Carolina Lectureship will be hosted by the *Marion church of Christ* April 2-6. The theme of this year's program is "The Works of the Flesh Versus the Fruit of the Spirit." If you would like to know more, call

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WILMINGTON, NC...

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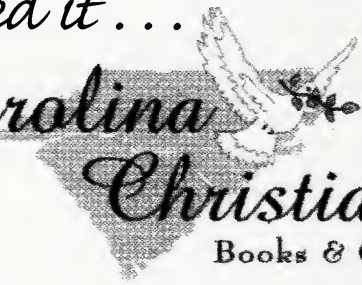
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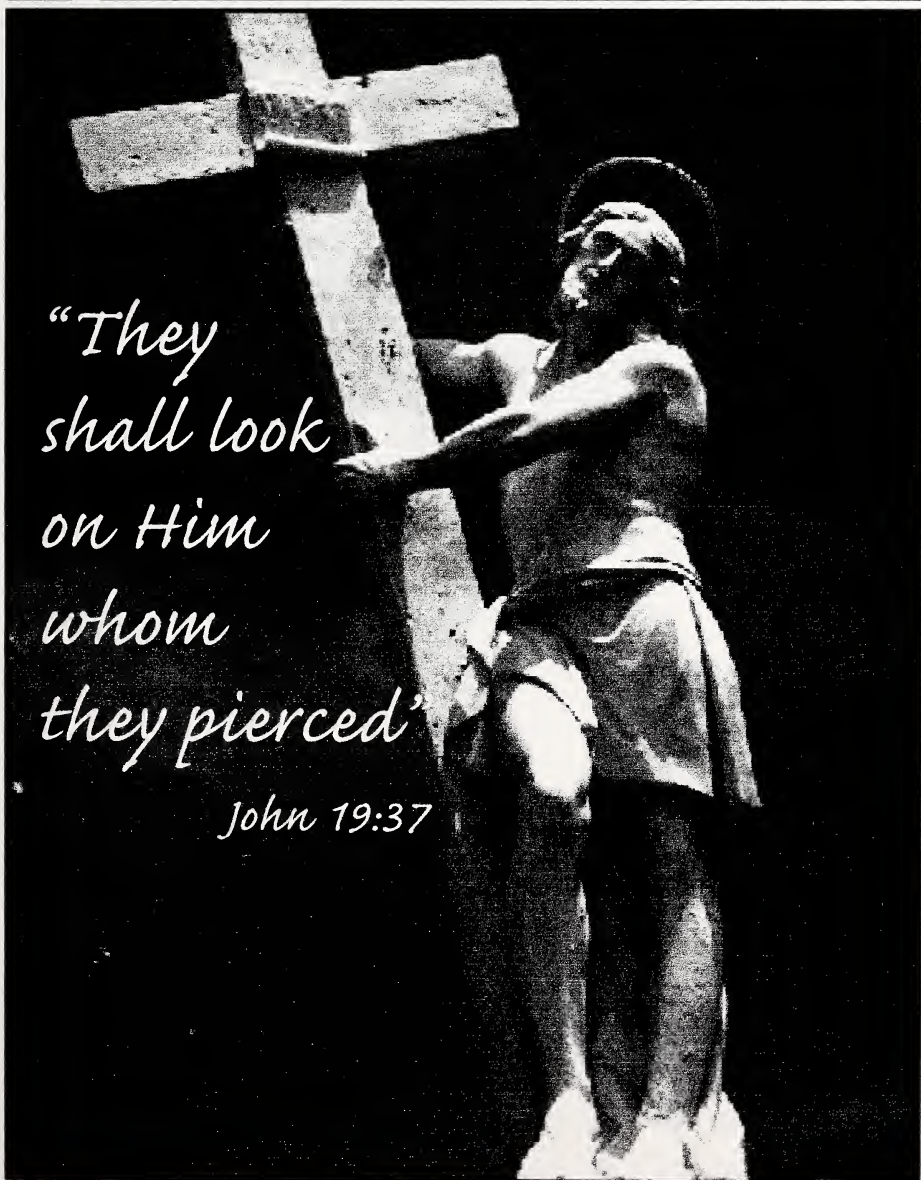
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shall look
on Him
whom
they pierced"*

John 19:37



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The Certainty of Uncertainty.....

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ith the tax
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Dennis Conner

Success is not what you
think! Just when you

marching steadily nearer, we are reminded of that old and well-worn maxim that the only things in life that are certain are death and taxes. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes would add one more item: *uncertainty*. One of the things that makes life under the sun (life lived without God; the wholly secular life) so empty and meaningless is the unmitigated uncertainty of life. So many today seek to build their lives on a "sure thing," but the notion of sure success or sure happiness in a life lived with man himself at the center is most surely "vanity of vanities." Those who would attempt it would do well to give an ear to the sage observations of the Preacher. He put it this way:

"The race is not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor bread to the wise,
Nor riches to men of understanding,
Nor favor to men of skill;
But time and chance
happen to them all.
For man also does not know his time;
Like fish taken in a cruel net,
Like birds caught in a snare,
So the sons of men are snared
in an evil time,
When it falls suddenly upon them."

(Ecclesiastes 9:11-12)

In the Hebrew text there are five negative references with each one appearing at the beginning of each phrase. This is done for emphasis. "Not to the swift is the race..." etc. His point?

think you have reached the top rung of the ladder, suddenly it can be snatched from under you!

*"The one
constant
in life is
the steady
love of
God."*

The philosophy of our day seems to be quite logical and pragmatic. Train hard and practice hard, and the gold medal is yours. Build a bigger army than anyone else, and the battle is yours. Get your MBA and you've got it made!

Increase your

speed, get stronger, smarter, bigger and better, work harder and longer, and you'll have life by the tail! It seems to make so much sense, but there is a fundamental flaw in this thinking—it assumes that we are in total control of our lives. If you're currently standing on the top rung of that illusory ladder, brace yourself. You could be in for a nasty fall. Time and chance will inevitably tap you on the shoulder and introduce themselves.

The truth is that, according to the Preacher, life is unpredictable. Of that we can be certain. In this journey through the world we are much like the fish or the bird. We can easily fall prey to the snares of life. Unexpected pitfalls, market reversals, and difficulties can derail our best laid plans and strategies. Without warning we are entrapped, ensnared.

What are we to do, then? Forget about working hard and planning? Go through life haphazardly and unprepared? No, that isn't Solomon's point. His point is that the perspective of the world—trust in one's own strength and ability—will not, in and of itself, lead to success and meaning in life. As Richard DeHaan writes, "We all stand helpless before the unknown and need a source of confidence and understanding beyond ourselves." At this point in his observations Solomon doesn't point his

readers directly to that source, but eventually He will (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Until then, it is enough for him to expose the brittle illusions of those who live "under the sun."

Life is unpredictable; of that we can be sure. Has your own life turned out just exactly how you had envisioned it would five, ten, twenty years ago? No? Then trust in the sovereign and eternal God. The one constant in life is the steadfast love of God. Of that you can be certain.

New Directory Coming

I'm pleased to tell you that at a meeting of the Board of Directors in March, 1999 it was determined to publish a year 2000 edition of the Directory of Churches of Christ in the Carolinas. Due to my wife's illness, however, we were not able to meet again and finalize plans for the new directory. We are back on course now and revisions to the last directory (1997) are being made, complete with e-mail addresses and church website locations. Our target date for making the directory available is September 30, 2000. In the meantime, look for an announcement about a pre-publication special in upcoming issues of *Carolina Christian*.

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Urgent Need!

The Church and Morality:

Introduction (1).....

“**R**ead any good books lately?” I get asked that question occasionally, especially from my brothers in the preaching fraternity. I suppose the answer to that depends to some extent on the meaning of the term “good books.” If by that the questioner means have I read anything that is worth recommending others find the time to read, well – those books seem to be getting fewer and farther between these days.

There are some exceptions to that general observation. I recently read two books by the same author that I found extraordinarily insightful as well as conformational to what I have seen happening in our culture in the past quarter century. The author is David F. Wells. The two books are *God in the Wasteland* and *Losing Our Virtue*.

The subtitles are intriguing as well. *God in the Wasteland* is subtitled *The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. The second book, *Losing Our Virtue*, is subtitled *Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*.

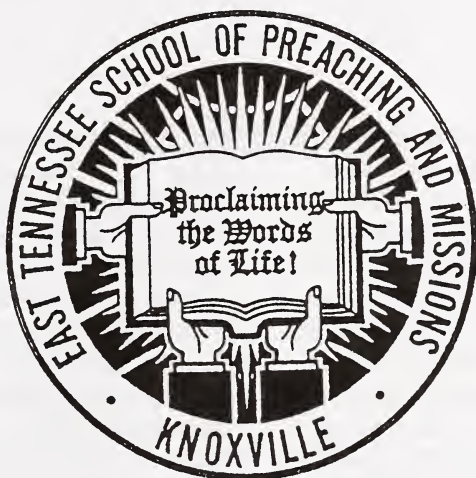
Losing Our Virtue is about the disintegrating moral culture in American society. This is not the first nor is it likely to be the last book dealing with that subject, especially in light of the moral decay and scandals chronicled in our nation’s capitol over the past decade. What is instructive about the book is Wells’ ability and willingness to ask the question of what the disintegrating moral culture means to the church.

Ron Newberry

In the coming issues of *Carolina Christian*, I want to share with you some of the more salient points made by Wells. To use his terms, “I am understanding theology, then, as the work of bringing the truth of God’s Word into lively intersection with the life of the church, as it exists in its own culture, with the intention of seeing Christian understanding, character, and behavior made more authentic.” (p. 2)

He asks a question that many of us would be afraid to broach: “Can the Church recover its moral character enough to make a difference in a society whose fabric is now much frayed?” (p. 18) That implies that the church (which Wells would identify as all of Christendom) has lost its moral character as well as its moral voice. It also implies that before the church (regardless of how narrow our definition might be) can speak with any authority to a crumbling culture, it must regain its own moral character.

Wells follows that penetrating question with another one that brings into focus a most pertinent issue: “How can our spirituality regain its moral weight?” (p. 19). Again, the implication is clear. Somewhere along the way we (the church) have lost our way in terms of morality as it relates both to the church itself (tolerating immorality within) and to the culture at large (refusing to speak out against immorality without). Illustrations of both of those implications are abundant.



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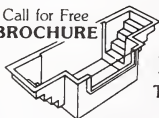
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To be sure, we are not the only ones or even the first ones to wrestle with these issues. Our first century brothers and sisters struggled with them too. Philippians 2:15-16 notes that they lived in a culture described by Paul as a "crooked and depraved generation." But he notes that the Christians at Philippi maintained their ability to "shine like stars in the universe" holding out and holding on to the word of life. In other words, they lived in a morally degenerate culture but they continued to remain above the decay maintaining their moral character and their moral weight.

Wells tries to understand our culture. However, as he states, he does not want to understand culture for its own sake.

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He wants to understand it so that it is instructive to Christians and particularly illuminating for the sake of our missionary mandate to reach into the culture and reclaim the lost.

Jesus spoke with clarity and passion to his disciples in John 15:19, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

In his prayer to the Father, Jesus said, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:14-16).

It remains a clear challenge to the church to maintain contact with the culture in order to redeem those in sin while keeping sufficient distance from the world so that we are not contaminated with sin. We cannot afford to abandon the world to the devil. Neither can we afford to bend over so far to help the world that we fall in. We must remain in the world without being of the world.

Ron Newberry serves as Associate Editor of Carolina Christian. He preaches for the Friendly Ave. church of Christ in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

The Bread, the Cup, and Being "the Greatest"

attitude. How important it is in growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Of all the people who should have understood what it meant to have a Christ-like attitude the apostles should have, but so often they just didn't. The night of the institution of the Lord's Supper provided Jesus with the opportunity to teach them a valuable lesson about discipleship.

"And when the hour had come He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God,'" (Luke 22:14-16, NASB).

As Jesus prepared for His death in these final hours, He used the occasion of the Passover to teach the disciples yet again and leave them with something by which they would remember Him. It's obvious that Jesus valued fellowship with others. He said that He "earnestly desired to eat this Passover" with them. A convicting question for us today is "Do we have the same spiritual desire for fellowship with one another?" This kind of fellowship is fundamental to discipleship to Jesus. Jesus certainly desires for His disciples that we enjoy and practice this kind of fellowship with Himself and others.

In verse sixteen the Lord spoke of "the kingdom of God," which He frequently preached about during His

Randy Gore

ministry. The kingdom would be made up of those

who put themselves under Christ's authority and would live accordingly. This kingdom would be established by Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) in His death, burial, resurrection and reign from heaven. As the true Passover Lamb for us, Jesus would a new kind of Passover (the remembrance of His sacrifice for us). And just as He was with those apostles at this last supper He took with them, so Jesus is similarly and spiritually with us today when we take the Supper in His kingdom.

"And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.' And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them saying, 'this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way He took the cup after they had

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eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood,'"
(verses 17-20).

Jesus took the familiar items of the Passover meal and gave them to the disciples as a way to be frequently reminded of Him. The bread, He said, "is my body" and we take it in "remembrance" of Him. As we take the bread today, we remember the fact that Jesus took on a human body, that He "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). For the Son of God, He who has always existed and who created the world, this act of becoming flesh was an act of great sacrifice in itself. But that was not all, of course. Jesus was then nailed to, hung on and died on a cross in this fleshly body—the ultimate act of humility. It is just that kind of humble attitude that Christ wants His disciples to have (see Philippians 2:5-8).

With the cup, Jesus informed the apostles that "this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (verse 20). His blood would secure this new promise of eternal life for those who would be in His kingdom. Citizenship in the kingdom and the benefits of citizenship—forgiveness of sin, a relationship with God, and eternal life—would be experienced because of the offering and sacrifice of Christ.

"But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Me on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them

it might be who was going to do this thing," (verses 21-23).

How ironic, and sad, that the very table at which Jesus presented the Lord's Supper also supported the hands of the one who would betray Jesus. The words "the one betraying" in verse 21 translate the Greek word *paradidontos*, which describes a person who is presently and actively betraying someone. Judas was already betraying Jesus at that very moment. The betrayal did not occur merely in the act of pointing out Jesus with a kiss to the Roman officials. Nor did it occur only in the deal Judas made. He was continually betraying the Lord, in his heart and in his deeds, even as he sat at the table with Jesus and the others.

This image of Judas taking the Lord's supper should be heeded by all of us today. Judas participated in the same act that the other apostles did. However, his worship was vain. As one who takes the Supper each week, what is your heart like? Your lifestyle? Do you live a life that is not reflective of the salvation and relationship with God with which you have been blessed? Do you attend worship and to through all the correct acts of worship outwardly, while inwardly your heart is not right? Remember that Judas did this at the initiation of the Lord's Supper. He appeared to be a true disciple, but his heart and lifestyle were not acceptable in the sight of Jesus.

Then, notice the reaction of the apostles after Jesus' statement about the

betrayers being at the table. They began to discuss who it might be. So often, when another is in sin people talk, speculate, and become suspicious. The apostles began talking and speculating, when in fact they would all end up sinning themselves (Mark 14:27). In John's account a specific reaction of Peter is noted: "There was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore gestured to him, and said to him, 'Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking,'" (John 13:23-24). Peter appeared to be more consumed with the error of someone else than he was with being true to Christ himself. In a matter of hours Peter would himself deny Jesus, but for the moment was preoccupied with the fault of someone else. Perhaps this was an evidence of his own insecurity regarding his relationship with Jesus. Christians who are insecure in their own faith, who carry guilt from their pasts, or are presently involved with sinful practices want to find out things that are negative (whether supposed or real) about others. This is a tactic that Satan for ages has used to hurt the effectiveness of the church. The attitude of Peter and the others in this regard reminds us of the need for a godly attitude toward Christ and our fellow disciples.

"And there arose a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have

authority over them are called Benefactors. But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves,'" (verses 24-27).

Here at the table Jesus convicted the apostles of having attitudes like those who do not know God. It is an honor to be known as someone who serves—to be a "benefactor." However, it is hypocritical to give the impression that we serve when in reality we abuse our position for our own personal gain. It is also wrong to serve others for the purpose of being seen by men (Matthew 23:5). Jesus did not want His disciples to be that way. To be great in the spiritual sense will mean that a disciple will have an attitude that he is a younger person (in that culture, unlike ours, greater honor was reserved for those

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who were older). That is, he will serve and treat others with honor as a younger person is supposed to treat older people. Regardless of a person's age, years in the church, or "status" with others, he should treat them as those who are to be served and honored. The real leader, Jesus said, is a servant.

And we have as our model Jesus Himself. He asked, "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves?" The obvious answer (in the world's eyes) would be that the one reclining is greater; that is, the one *being* served. However, Jesus then said, in a powerful reversal, "But I am among you as the one who serves." In other words, although He was Himself reclining at the table, He has still shown Himself that night to be a servant. As He would say in

another text, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many," (Matthew 20:28).

May we look to the example and attitude of our Savior when each week we break bread in His memory. May we be mindful of our attitude towards our brothers and sisters. May we conduct ourselves on a daily basis as those who sit at the table of Jesus. The imitation of Christ's example will start with an attitude—an attitude that is not focused on self-glorying or on degrading others and exploiting their faults, but that is instead focused on loving and glorifying God by loving and serving others.

Randy Gore can be reached at (706) 568-8922, or by e-mail at: RNGore@juno.com.

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person on CNN going
down in a blaze of glory. I

named Darrell Scott came to speak at ACU. You may have heard of him, but probably not. In his own words, he's not rich and he's not famous, he's a "dad with a message." What's important about Mr. Scott is that he lives in Littleton, Colorado, and that his children go to Columbine High School. His daughter, Rachel Scott, was one of the twelve students murdered by their classmates.

Mr. Scott's message was simple: that we can make a difference in our world. That we can be kind to people instead of being violent, and that maybe, just maybe, that can start a chain reaction that will prevent future massacres in our schools and on our streets.

I want to talk about this with you because you probably know that a six-year-old was shot in Michigan not long ago. By another six-year-old! Columbine High lost two more students recently, this time in a Subway sandwich shop. The anniversary of the Columbine tragedy is coming up, and some of you may have this on the brain.

To be honest with you, talking about shootings in schools is scary. I think we all know that the shootings are not necessarily over. There could be more—in Abilene, or in Raleigh, or in Myrtle Beach, or in Yadkinville. I don't say that to scare you but just to admit the reality — that Satan is at work in our world, and that some person that we know might one day decide that he or she wants to be the next

: guarantee you that there are people in
: your lives who are praying for you,
: pleading that God protect you and your
: school from such atrocities.

: It is a hard thing to grow up (Toys-R-
: Us kids are going to be disappointed),
: but we all have to do it sometime. And
: one part of growing up is realizing that
: the world is not a nice place. People
: aren't always nice to one another, and
: they don't always treat others the way
: they would like to be treated. There is a
: word that describes our world: "fallen."
: That means that our world is not ideal.
: It's not the way God meant it to be. It's
: not all sunshine and rainbows and milk
: and cookies.

: Some of you have known that for a
: long time, I'm sure. If your family is not
: the most well-to-do in town, you've
: probably already grown up quite a bit
: from having to cut back now and then.
: If you've been abused or neglected, I'm
: certain that you're in touch with the
: suffering that is present in our world.
: Others of you have not had those
: experiences, and so events like
: Columbine, Jonesboro, and Paducah have
: been a rude awakening for you.

: I want to say to all of you the same
: thing that Mr. Scott said to us that
: evening here at ACU: you, each one of
: you, can make a difference in the world.
: You can smile at someone in your school
: halls. You can obey Jesus and pray for
: your enemies. You can treat other people

the way you would like to be treated. You can tell others about Jesus, not condemning them to hell but sharing with them the good news of eternal life. You can do your best (and ask God to help you even when it's painful) to grow the fruit of the Spirit in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. You can work at forgiving the people around you who sin against you, who call you names, who ridicule you for being a Christian. You can be Jesus to the world, and you can see Jesus in the world.

I wish I could give you a guarantee that if we are all little Jesuses in our worlds then nothing bad will ever happen

to us. It's not true, guys. I'm sorry. But this is very important: God's mission in the world is to change lives, and He will let us join Him in that. We may never know the tragedies that we avert by being the salt of the earth and the light of the world, but I plead with you to be those things. Please be Jesus to everyone you know, even if it means changing your life from top to bottom. Ask God to help you become more like Jesus.

Who knows how the world could change with little Jesuses running around everywhere? Let's find out, starting in the Carolinas!

David Kneip is a graduate student at Abilene Christian

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South Carolinians Go To South America.....

Nine members of churches of Christ in South Carolina joined a team of seven from Tennessee for two weeks of mission work in Guyana, South America. The campaign was organized by Wayne Pruette from Dickson, Tennessee. Billy McVey, preacher for the church of Christ in Kingstree, South Carolina and director of the Central Carolina School of Preaching, recruited the workers from South Carolina. Jody Evans, Brandon Farrell, Greg Johnson, and Willie Whack are students from the Central Carolina School of Preaching. Freddie McCray is a CCSP graduate. Also joining the mission team were Mary Willis and Lorraine Hampton from Hemmingway, SC and Mark Hudson from Aiken.

The South Carolina workers arrived in Georgetown, Guyana after nightfall on Sunday, February 20. They traveled southeast along the Atlantic coast to the Corentyne River which is the border with Suriname. Campaigns were conducted in the villages of Crabwood Creek and Orealla. Crabwood Creek is at the end of the paved road near the mouth of the Corentyne River. It has a large East Indian population with a strong Muslim and Hindu influence. As a former British Colony, the official language in Guyana is English. Other remnants of the British empire include right-hand drive vehicles and the Anglican church. Crabwood Creek is fairly modern by Guyanese standards with electric current available in many homes. Although less common, some have an indoor water spigot and telephone service. Industries in the area include lumber mills, rice and sugar cane production. The church is growing strong in this village. Thirty-one were baptized in Crabwood Creek. The church in Crabwood

Mark Hudson

Creek has no permanent meeting place, and the harvest of the campaign necessitated a move to a new temporary location.

Located fifty miles south on the Corentyne River, Orealla is a principle village on an American Indian Reservation. Accessible only by boat, villagers live in thatched roof huts without phone, electricity, or cars. A subsistence living is earned through fishing, trapping, collecting jungle fruit, growing pineapples, or cutting trees in the rain forest. A community water system was recently installed with spigots throughout the village.

Targeted by numerous American missionaries, Orealla is a village of 1,200 residents with about nine denominational churches. The church of Christ was established a few years ago and the building was completed last year. The building is also being used by the Orealla public school. Two hundred, thirty children attend school in one room measuring 40x30 feet. The school had no dictionary until one was presented as a gift from the missionaries. The church of Christ in Orealla is served by a Native American Indian preacher who received training at the school of preaching in Suriname. Five were baptized in this village during the one week campaign. Smaller groups from this mission team made trips into the interior of Guyana and into neighboring Suriname resulting in about five more baptisms.

South American mission trips are a regular part of the training students receive at the Central Carolina School of Preaching. For information about the school or future mission trips contact Billy McVey at the church of Christ in Kingstree, SC, (843) 382-5824 or (843) 354-5362.

Family Ties

Cruel Parents?

Paul Jarrett

Now, I've not written this

just to acquaint you with

what goes on in the head of a toy poodle. Rather, I want to make a point about what constitutes cruelty. In my original view of things, confining Cin to a cage seemed cruel. However, I came to realize that the real cruelty was leaving him alone in the house and then becoming upset with him when he responded to his own fears in a manner that I viewed as destructive.

This same lesson need to be learned by those who view the setting down of rules of conduct as "cruel." I've heard some criticize parents who set rules and limits for their children as being "harsh" or even "cruel." I've heard many depict God as cruel because He chose to place restrictions on man's conduct. The question can be raised, "What is cruel?"

Isn't it more cruel to give children more responsibility and freedom than they can handle, and then become upset with them when they react to their fears in a manner we find unsettling? Isn't that more cruel than to supply them with rules of conduct that provide them with both direction and security?

In the same way, would it not be more cruel if God had simply created us and then left us with no guidelines for how we ought to live? Rather than denying God's directives and wreaking havoc on the earth, men need to appreciate the purpose of God's commandments. We need to have the sense shown by my toy poodle and meekly take shelter under God's wing. The discerning heart recognizes that His commandments are not a cage, but a refuge!

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Dr., Naples, FL 34102.

Years ago our family became the property of a toy poodle (you don't own dogs, they own you!). Cinnamon ("Cin" for short) soon manifested one annoying character trait. Cinnamon made it quite plain that he did not like being left alone in the house. Unlike Star (the cockapoo who had preceded Cin), who used our absence to relax, Cin used the time we were gone to dismantle the house.

When it became obvious that Cinnamon had no intention of altering his behavior pattern, I finally invested money in a cage to place him in when we were gone. I had at first resisted this notion, not because of the cost of the cage, but because it seemed cruel to confine Cinnamon to such a small space. The point of this article has to do with a lesson I've learned from Cin's reaction to this confinement.

It soon became obvious that Cinnamon had no objections to being placed in the cage. In fact, when we started getting to leave, Cin would stand in his cage waiting for us to shut the door! This behavior seemed strange to us until a friend told us of what an animal psychologist (I'm not joking) had to say about a dog's view of being left alone in a large house.

It seems that when a dog is left alone, especially a small dog like a toy poodle, they are frightened by the responsibility. Thus, they begin to gather everything in the house into one spot. The reason Cinnamon welcomed the cage was because it represented security in a smaller space and removed from him the weight of responsibility of looking after the whole house.

The Way Home.....

the early Sunday sun was already baking the air inside the old blue sedan. He hadn't passed another car in over an hour, and the flat, dusty West Texas scenery hadn't changed a bit. "I could almost see forever," he thought. "But then, there's not much to see, between here and there."

Rolling into another hole in the wall town, Craig finally admitted to himself he was lost. This shortcut he was on had turned out to be like so many of his decisions lately: a mistake. Always in a hurry, but never getting anywhere.

The main road was deserted. He scanned the few red brick buildings, looking for signs of life, for someone who could direct him back to the Interstate. There was no one in sight.

That's when he came up on the cute little country chapel, with the sign out front that read "Church of Christ Meets Here" in big block letters. He started to drive on past, but something inside him made him stop.

Craig was tired of driving, tired of being lost, tired of the constant boredom and loneliness that hung like an anchor on his heart. It had been so long...Pulling into the gravel drive, he thought, "Why not? At least there should be someone here to give me directions."

He opened the front door. Stepping into the cramped foyer, he could hear the people singing in the auditorium ahead of him. He entered, sitting on a back pew without causing too much commotion. The congregation of forty or so seemed an odd mix to Craig; poor farmers, migrant workers, Carolina Christian

Stephen J. Walls-Mathis

school teachers, a businessman or two, a few widows, and

dozens of children. Something about them stood out; there was joy in their voices, and when they caught each other's glance, you could see concern and love flowing both ways. "What do they have that I lack," he asked himself?

Not long after he came in, the church grew silent and a few men gathered around the table up front. Someone said a prayer, and they began passing the trays. He noticed that as the trays passed from one person to the next, they paid attention to each other, they shared with a sense of reverence and eagerness. It was as if everyone was saying a silent blessing.

The metal trays were worn and dented, the flat bread a little stale, and the juice a bit too old. But these people valued these things, they valued each other. And they valued him, too. When it was his turn, they passed the trays to him without hesitation, with the same reverence and love, drawing him into the blessing.

"This is the Lord's body, broken for you...This is the Lord's blood, shed for our sins." He was struck speechless by the holiness of that place. He saw their love for God, he saw their love for each other, and he saw their love for him.

Later that day, back in his car, back on the dusty road, he couldn't help thinking he had found his way home.

Stephen can be contacted at 355 Carpenters Mill Rd., Ruckersville, VA 22968.

MUMBAI, INDIA...

Craig Phillips from Wilkesboro, NC has been serving as a missionary to Mumbai, India. Thirty-five in this congregation started the new year with seven days of prayer and fasting. *Tony Forrest* from the Morganton, NC church of Christ and *George Stevenson* from Statesville, NC recently assisted Craig for two weeks. They helped in leadership development, song-leading, and with special lessons on India's Republic Day. Lessons at this gathering were especially intended to bring back those who have wandered away from Christ. Two Christians has been restored to fellowship. For information about Craig's work in India you may contact: Wilkesboro Church of

Christ, P.O. Box 1962,
Wilkesboro, NC 28659
Telephone:
(336) 838-5695.

RALEIGH, NC...

The *North Raleigh Church of Christ* will celebrate its tenth anniversary June 24-25 with a two day anniversary celebration.

DUNCAN, SC...

Southeastern Children's Home will have its ninth annual auction on Saturday, May 6. The Silent Auction will begin at 5:30 p.m. and the live auction at 7:00 p.m. Both events will be held at the Central Church of Christ annex building at 2052 North Church St. Place in Spartanburg, SC. The home is currently soliciting items of all kinds for the auction. For more information contact *Cindy Peden* at (864) 439-0259.

**JERUSALEM,
ISRAEL...**

The first world meeting of churches of Christ in modern history will take place in Jerusalem August 27–September 3. Christians from more than 140 nations are expected to come together and share what the Lord has done in their nation and dream about what He wants us to do in the years ahead. Already brothers and sisters from Africa, Europe, Asia and the Caribbean are making plans to attend. If you're interested in attending, call 1-800-999-9912 for travel information. You can also receive more information by sending an e-mail to this address: PIPBill@compuserve.com. (This news item comes from *Bill McDonough* on behalf of the Committee of Concerned Brethren).

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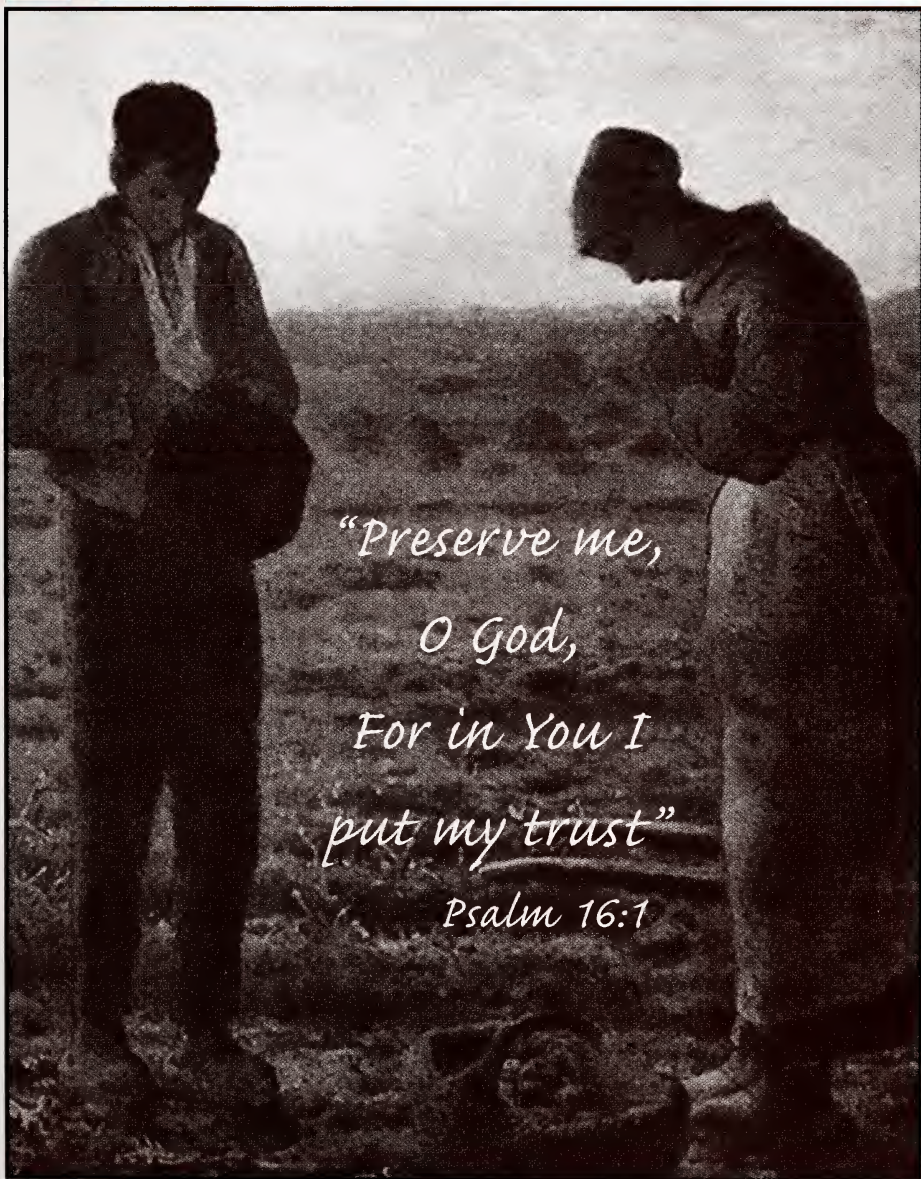
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Those Joyful Eyes

One of the first things I noticed were the eyes. They were bright, sparkling, joyful, and they belonged to a man who by worldly standards seemingly had very little to be joyful about. But this man does not live by the standards of the world.

He is an elderly Ukrainian brother named Leonid. Now 75 years old, Leonid has been confined to his bed for the past six years because of a series of debilitating strokes. He is paralyzed from the waist down. Day in and day out, he lies there, the monotony of his day only occasionally broken by visitors from the church. Friends from his job and his past have long since forgotten him. Leonid and his wife, Nina, live on a pensioner's stipend of \$40 a month between the two of them. From this they must pay the rent and buy food and medicine. His mind has not been impaired—only his body—so he is fully aware of his circumstances. Yet, for all this, his wife describes him as a joyful man. She says that he never complains about his circumstances and seldom gets frustrated when his body no longer responds as it once did. I had already suspected all this; I could see it in his

Dennis Conner

eyes.

Two years ago Leonid realized that he needed Christ and wanted to be baptized, even though he was paralyzed. He was loaded into an ambulance and taken to a public swimming pool. Once there, four brothers in Christ placed him into a blanket and lowered him, blanket and all, into the pool. His useless body penetrated the surface of the water and descended by faith into the depths of union with Christ. As the brothers lifted Leonid out of the water his paralyzed body was no different than before, but God had raised his soul to new

"The source
of authentic,
lasting joy
is not
circumstances,
but a
relationship."

life. And Leonid's eyes sparkled!

Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say rejoice." The key phrase here is "in the Lord." The source of authentic, lasting joy is not circumstances, but a relationship. It is found only in a relationship with Jesus, the Lord of circumstances. When one has Christ, he or she can be joyful, even when paralyzed and confined to a bed for six years. Brother Leonid knows little if anything about theology and doctrine, but he does know Christ. And his eyes sparkle at the mention of His name.

I visited with Leonid a few weeks ago

in his small apartment in Odessa, Ukraine. It had been a year since my last visit, but the eyes were the same. He smiled that infectious smile as I looked once again into those eyes, and as I did I was instantly assured that all is right because of Jesus' joy. I left with them \$100 from money that my brethren in Yadkinville had given to be used for needy Christians in Odessa. The joy in Leonid's eyes was worth infinitely more.

On April 20, nine days after I had returned home, I received an e-mail from Dima Kolomiets, the young preacher in Odessa. He wrote, "The money you gave

for Leonid was an act of providence. He died yesterday and we were at the funeral today."

Not so strangely, I was not particularly saddened at this news. Rather, the corners of my mouth upturned into a bit of a smile, and I thought to myself, "His eyes are really sparkling now."

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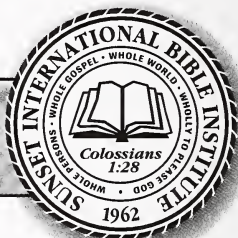
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Urgent Need!

The Church and Morality: *Moral Decline (2)*

Continuing with this series of articles on the Church and Morality, I want to discuss in this issue the alarming moral decline we have witnessed in our culture. Let me remind you that I am gleaning a number of thoughts from the book by David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*.

Robert Bork, the one time Supreme Court nominee, correctly noted in an article titled "The Hard Truth about America" (*The Christian Activist*, October, 1995), "The traditional virtues of this culture are being lost, its vices multiplied, its values degraded; in short, the culture itself is unraveling." Surveys across the land over the last three to five years confirm that not only is Bork correct, Americans believe that he is correct.

In other words the moral decline in America is no longer an arguable issue. Even those in denial have had to acknowledge that there is a serious moral predicament in America.

Frequently the argument is made that even during the time when (as we tend to believe) high moral standards reigned (specifically the Victorian era) there was rampant sin. Since sin is a universal

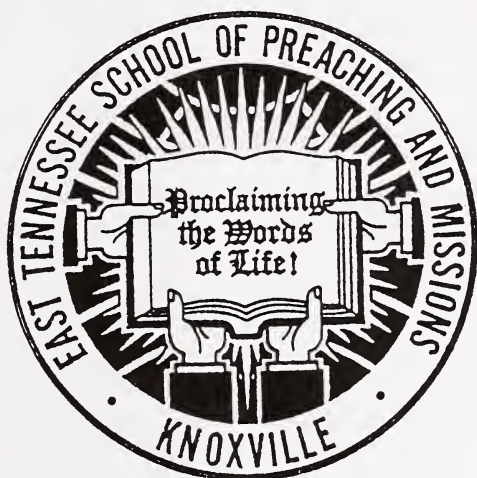
Ron Newberry

problem and one that transcends time, it is easy to draw the conclusion about the sinfulness of man regardless of the era in which he may have lived. Those in the strictest moral cultures fell woefully short of their ideals. "They were filled with hypocrisy because they preached one thing and did another," the argument goes. Whether they were hypocrites or not is not as relevant as the fact that they did indeed fail to live up to what they determined to be a moral code for life. They were to no one's surprise sinners—like all the rest of us!

All of that is an accurate assessment of that time. What is overlooked is the implication of one

*"Is it worse
to fall short
of moral
ideals
or to have
no moral
ideals to
violate?"*

particular question: Is it worse to fall short of moral ideals or to have no moral ideals to violate? In other words, which is preferable, an age in which high standards are not attained or an age in which there are no standards? Which is more desirable, a time where hypocrisy is prevalent because they did not live up to their moral principles or a time when hypocrisy is not possible



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because there are no moral principles to violate.

The broad acceptance of vulgarity in our American culture and the generally acknowledged "right" one has to his own personal lifestyle no matter how deviant it may be has left us culturally with few behaviors deemed morally wrong. Morality has been dumbed down.

The secularization of our age "...has decimated any moral consensus that was once present (p.60)." Truth and right have lost their grip on our society. Our moral core has been removed. God has been marginalized. God has been relegated to the periphery of life and therefore has little relevancy to the average American. Both our public and private worlds have lost their center. Traditional culture, which addressed issues of morals, is dying and, if not already beyond resuscitation, is at least on life support.

This tension between law and freedom has always existed. Technically we have the freedom to do that which is not illegal. We remember the questions surrounding Vice President Gore's fundraising escapade at the Buddhist temple and his response was, "There is no controlling legal authority." In other words, since it was not illegal it was permissible. That is indicative of our generation.

At one time there was a clear gulf between law and freedom. Law tries to control and regulate freedom. Freedom seeks to be restraint free and have no

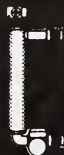
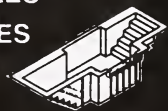
controls. They are always in tension. What lies between those to antagonistic perspectives? What spans the gulf between law and freedom? It is called character. Character is that which regulates freedom in the absence of law. One does not have to have some external controlling legal authority to do the right thing. Character maintains a healthy balance between law and liberty. Character compels us to do certain things and not to do other things. Those with high character do not first ask, "Is it legal or illegal?" People with character ask, "Is it right, ethical and indicative of someone with integrity?"

Therefore, conclusion one should draw from this analysis is simple and yet profound. If we are to ever reclaim the moral high ground in our culture, we must find a way to rebuild the character of our people. We will continue to explore this concern in the next issue of Carolina Christian.

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Good Fences Make What?

I spent the afternoon in the college library, doing some research on the “one another” passages of the New Testament. I surrounded myself with books and journals, saw no one I knew, and spoke only to the girl behind the check out counter.

My research finished, I got back into my car and headed home. Before I left campus, a story came on National Public Radio’s news show, “All Things Considered.” As I pulled my Toyota out onto the highway, the commentator shared that his neighbor of three years had just died of a heart attack. It occurred to him that he didn’t even know the man’s name. They had passed each other dozens of times, made small talk about yard work, but had never introduced themselves. They were strangers, not neighbors.

I couldn’t help but think of all the neighbors I don’t know. Have I become so adept at building fences that I no longer have any room for neighbors in my life? How does that fit in the second greatest commandment? Can I love my neighbor as myself if I don’t even know her name?

The same thing happens in our congregations. We pass each other in the aisles at the church building, make small talk before and after worship, but we don’t know each other. Sure, I send out e-mail, but how personal is that? A few lines on the screen, or a dumb joke I’m passing

Stephen J. Walls-Mathis

on hardly constitute meaningful interaction. If

all my conversations are electronic, am I really living out my faith? How can I love my brother and sister and not even know who they are?

Jesus has something different in mind when He calls us into His church. He wants us to be connected, to have communion not only with Him but with each other. He wants us to do more than just learn each other’s name. We are called to love each other, actively—that’s how the world will know that we are His disciples!

God created us with a need for other people. He knows we can’t make it on our own. He knows we need encouragement, comfort and admonition from people we can see, hear and touch. He created us with a need for community, a need to love and be loved.

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 John 4:7-8, NIV)

Do I know my neighbors well enough to love them well? Do I know my fellow Christians well enough to call them family, to be in communion with them? We have to move beyond small talk and put our faith into action. Love comes from God. May His love live in us and through us.

Stephen can be contacted at 355 Carpenters Mill Rd., Ruckersville, VA 22968.

Family Ties

Love Languages

dr. Gary Chapman is a noted authority on marriage and family. He has written a number of books dealing with the subject from a Christian perspective and can be heard regularly on many local Christian radio stations. I first heard Dr. Chapman speak in 1986 at a marriage seminar in Willoughby, Ohio. One of the things I learned at the seminar, which I have since incorporated into my own pre-marital counseling, has to do with the existence of five love languages.

The premise of Dr. Chapman's presentation (and the book he later wrote on the same subject) is that there are five ways we can express and receive love. Most of us, however, are not proficient in all five of these languages. This becomes a major problem in marriages where a husband and wife are not speaking the same love language. It can lead to one, or both, of them *feeling* unloved when their spouse truly does love them. If this problem is to be overcome, then both the husband and the wife need to make a serious effort to learn each other's preferred love language. These five love languages are:

Words: This means saying "I love you" verbally, or in a card or letter.

Touch: This refers to physical contact—holding hands, a hug, or the sexual relationship.

Gifts: These can range from a single rose to a new car, as long as the gift is prompted by love.

Paul Jarrett

Doing Things For: This can range from

performing simple chores around the house to caring for the house, or earning a living.

Spending Quality Time With: This involves doing all those things you did together when you were dating.

Take a moment and compare notes with your spouse about which of these ways of communicating your love makes you feel the most loved. Are you speaking the same language? If not, are you willing to learn?

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

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Wait on the Lord

a meek man
who is on his

David Macy

Almighty God, the Lord
can then guide and direct

way to the top stands still and waits on the Lord, instead of forging ahead and making a blunder and getting everything in a tangles mess. It is almost unbelievable how tangled and involved our lives become if we don't humble ourselves and wait on the Lord before making major decisions or important moves. It takes a meek, submissive, trusting person to wait on the Lord. Waiting is one of the most difficult things we are called upon to do as Christians. It is much easier, many times, to move and try something of our own devising than it is to wait for guidance from the Lord.

A lady was watching a potter at his work and she noticed that one foot was kept busy turning the wheel round and round, while the other rested patiently on the ground. She said, in a kind and sympathetic tone, "How tired your foot must be." The potter raised his eyes and said, "No, ma'am, it isn't the foot that works that's tired; it's the foot that stands."

The psalmist implored, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; and my glory: the rock of my strength and my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times; yea people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us," (Psalm 62:5-8). We wait on the Lord by committing ourselves into His hands, being subject to Him, and being silent before Him. When a person is meek and lowly and completely submissive to the

his life down the right paths that lead to happiness, peace, and protection from all harm.

There are two giant hurdles we must leap before we can wait on the Lord and receive the tremendous blessing which come with waiting. These two hurdles are pride and self-will. When we can lay pride to rest and replace it with meekness, when we can send self-will packing and put God's will in its place, then we can truly wait on the Lord. The results our waiting will be truly astounding to both ourselves and others.

My personal life has been like a constant tug of war with God on one end of the rope and me on the other. When I have stood still and let God do all the pulling, everything was good and successful. On the other hand, when I pulled in one direction and God in the other, everything was downhill and failure was my constant companion. Is that you? Are you having a tug of war with the Lord right now because you're not willing to wait on Him and submit completely to His will? Please give up the struggle, my friend, and let God have His way with you. Believe in Him with all your heart and meekly obey His simple commands and you shall find rest for your troubled soul. He will give you life and peace and you will be forever glad you let Him have His way with you.

David Murphy serves the Murphy Church of Christ and can be contacted at 4820 Appalachian Highway, Blue Ridge, GA 30513.

Thank-You Notes

dear
Grandma,

Thank you so much for the (fill in the blank) you sent me for (pick a holiday). I love it! It looks so good when I wear it on my (select a part of the body). (Or) It will help me (choose a hobby), and you know I like that! Thanks again, (sign your name).

Do you recognize this? Hopefully you've written lots of these in your life. It's a thank-you note, of course. Thank-you notes are pretty common in our society, and they are a great way to express appreciation to someone for something they've given you or done for you. We write thank-you notes after Christmases and birthdays, and sometimes we send them if a person has helped us with a school project, invited us over for dinner, or helped our family move.

Have you ever thought about what a thank-you note to God might look like? Bear with me for a moment. How about...

Dear God,

Thank you for helping my mother get well from her cancer. Thank you for keeping us safe on our trip. Thank you for all of the blessings you give us: food, clothes, home, etc. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Guess what? You write thank-you notes to God all the time! (At least I hope you do.) Whenever we pray, we have a wonderful opportunity to thank God for all of the blessings in our lives and the many things He has done for us. Thank-

Carolina Christian

David Kneip

ing God for what He has done is as important in

prayer as praising Him for who he is and asking Him for the things we need.

The Bible has some wonderful examples of thank-you notes to God. The book of Psalms is full of psalms of thanksgiving. Psalms 105 and 106 are long, but they're worth reading. In them the writer thanks God over and over for His choosing Israel, His provision of food for them during the famine, His delivering them from Egypt, His opening up the Red Sea, His disciplining them when they sinned, and His remembering of His covenant even in times when the people ignored Him. Listen to the first line of Psalm 106: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever." I think these thank-you notes are the kind we usually write to God.

However, a second kind of thank-you note is more common in the New Testament. Specifically, it's one that Paul uses in nearly all of his letters. It starts out something like, "I thank my God every time I remember you in my prayers," or "I have not stopped giving thanks for you." Paul thanks God for the people to whom he's writing the letter. Not only that, he tells the people about it. Paul doesn't, though, just say "Thank you" and leave it at that; rather, he explains what it is about the recipient of the letter that he is thankful for: their knowledge, their gifts, their faith, their love, their partnership in the gospel, etc. I challenge you to read through Paul's

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letters and to notice specifically what he is thankful for with each church and how that plays out in the rest of the book.

The reason I want to remind you of this part of Paul's writing is that I think that thanking God for the people in our lives is something we probably don't do enough. When was the last time you intentionally thanked God for your parents, your siblings, your friends, your teachers, or the people at your church? Did you thank Him generally, or did you get specific? I believe that we need to thank God more often for the people He has blessed us with and for the gifts which He has given them. That is part of praying for the people around us, something that Jesus models for us and

teaches us to do for our friends and our enemies. Not only should we pray for those people, though, but maybe we should also tell those people periodically as well. We shouldn't be arrogant about it ("Look how spiritual I am; I've been praying for you!"), but maybe we could write little notes, just like Paul, in which we tell others that we appreciate them and thank God for what they mean to us.

We all believe that God gives us everything we need, don't we? The Bible tells us that God gives us more than we could ever ask or even imagine! Let's thank him for those things, and especially those people, starting today!

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Getting Answers From God

“*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Eph. 5:15-17).

Wellington H. Smith, Jr.

It ought to be very important to us to get the right answer to any question concerning God’s will. Obviously, we doom ourselves to getting wrong answers if we employ carnal criteria (John 7:24), or if we use any standard other than the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15-17), etc.

However, even searching the Scriptures diligently does not assure us of getting at the truth! (Cf. John 5:39,40) We need to learn a proper attitude and a proper approach to the whole matter of getting the right answers from God’s word.

Hindrances to Getting the Right Answers

In an age of quickness and convenience, we are less and less willing to dig for truth, to study and pray, to think and wrestle with a question—we lose patience with problems that do not have easy solutions. We jump to conclusions, prematurely taking a “position” on a difficult passage or issue before we are in a position to do so responsibly. We oversimplify complex questions, demanding that matters be made easier than they can be. For example, at times we are willing to consider

only one factor in a decision that actually involves many more. We seem to want to reduce discerning God’s will to a

simple, mechanical matter of pushing the right logical buttons so that our “answer” pops out automatically. We seem to wish God had given us a simple list of rules, a listing of the minimum requirements for going to heaven. We demand an easy, bottom line checklist of what we have to do and not do to be saved. Secretly, we may be dissatisfied with the “difficult” way God wrote the Bible. On questions about God’s will, we want a “formula” that will easily and quickly determine the right answer. We forget that “understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17) involves a process of discovery and discernment. We can be unduly hard to satisfy.

Sometimes we would accuse the Lord Himself of not giving us a straight answer to our questions (e.g. Luke 10:25-37), much like a teenager who complains that his or her parents won’t give a straight answer when asked to explain an answer the parent has given to that child. We assume that if an answer does not seem immediately satisfying to us, it cannot be the right answer! It’s as if the truth is always obvious and compelling to anybody and everybody. We are not content to be told that a thing must be decided patiently and reverently. However we might wish otherwise, the same thing is true of spiritual matters as is true in secular life: there are many important questions that require the experienced use of discernment.

Helps For Getting the Right Answers

Discernment is so important because our relationship with God is a personal one, rather than a mechanical one. We come to discern what will please Him by learning His character, His person; it is impossible to separate getting right answers about the Lord's will from knowing the Lord Himself. (Cf. Psalm 119:2,10) If we attempted to please our spouses in the same mechanical way we approach pleasing God, how would our marriages be? Growing in the ability to get right answers to questions about God's will comes down to gaining the powers of judgment and discrimination that come from spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:13-15).

It is only the renewed mind that is consistently able to "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1, 2). "Prove" is the translation of *dokimazo*—to test, assay, make trial of, put to the proof. (Cf. Romans 2:18; Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 1:9,10; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is those who "by reason of use have their senses exercised" who are able to "discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). We need to love God and His truth; we need to love to *obey* God's truth (Psalm 1:2; 119:14-16, 33-35, 97). We need to be always *growing* in the truth (2 Peter 3:18; cf. Apollos in Acts 18:24-26). There is no substitute for spiritual maturity, and no shortcut to it! We must avoid being naive in matters of spiritual judgment and should instead seek to be careful in the matter of discerning truth (Ephesians 5:15-17). We need to work at discerning truth, in

the fashion of the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11; Psalm 119:2, 10, 123; Proverbs 8:17; Matthew 7:7, 8; Proverbs 2:1-9).

Getting the right answers from God's word requires: an honest *intent* to obey the truth, diligent *effort* to find the truth, and spiritual *discernment* adequate to recognize the truth. We must approach Scripture with the intent to do what is right, listen without excuse, and act with courage (cf. Stephen R. Covey's suggestions concerning the use of conscience). The Lord will help those who truly want to grow in the ability to discriminate between truth and error (Ephesians 1:17,18; Colossians 1:9,10; James 1:5. Cf. 1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 119:18,19,29,73; Proverbs 2:6; Philippians 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:7).

Conclusion

We should never worry that, despite really wanting to do God's will, we will not be able to figure out what the truth is and therefore be lost. The person who honestly wants to obey God is going to get the information he needs to do so. As Jesus said, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled (Matthew 5:6) We often make knowing God's will harder than has to be. In most matters we cannot "find" the right answer for reasons other than have little to do with the difficulty of the question (John 6:60)! Getting the right answers is possible for anyone, but it requires diligence, patience, and real growth in spiritual maturity and discernment (Hebrews 5:14). Above all, learning God's truth requires an honest intent to obey the truth (John 7:17).

Wellington Smith, Jr. ("Smitty") preaches for the Walkup Ave. church in Monroe, NC. He can be contacted at 2501 Walkup Ave., Monroe, NC

Being a Bridge Builder

as Christians,
we are called by

Peter Rode

Not only did God seek
man by becoming one, but

God to be Christ's representatives. We have to step outside of our insulated Christian circles and learn how to bridge the gap between Christ, His church, and today's world. Yet, surprisingly, many Christians have cocooned themselves within the church family and have isolated themselves from the outside world. Jan Johnson calls these people "rabbit-hole Christians." According to Johnson, in an article entitled *Escaping the Christian Ghetto*, "In the morning they pop out of their safe Christian homes, hold their breath at work, scurry home to their families and then off to their Bible studies, and finally end the day praying for the unbelievers they safely avoided all day."

Bridges are designed to bring things together—land masses, road, and people. The greatest example of bridge building is found in the life of our Lord and Master. Through His incarnation, God crossed the "cultural gap" to seek man and to identify with him by actually becoming one. In doing so, He broke through two barriers that kept man from having a relationship with Him. First, Christ broke through the barrier of *humanity*. Christ took on the flesh, cultural patterns, thought patterns, practices (except sin), and frailty of humanity. He left His world and entered into our world. Second, Christ broke through the *sin* barrier. He went to the cross and became sin on our behalf so we could be forgiven of ours. Christ's sacrifice effect our reconciliation with God which, in turn, allows us to have a personal relationship with Him.

His commitment to seek man continues after Christ's death and resurrection—it continues through the church. That's why He has called every believer to the task of being an ambassador for Christ. But how do we go about this task? By following Jesus and breaking through the same barriers He did.

First, we need to break through the *humanity* barrier. Motivated by His love, we also need to enter into the world of unbelievers, seeking to understand their context and finding areas of common ground. This means that, without compromising, we are to get involved with real people and their needs, struggles and intellectual doubts.

Second, we need to help people overcome the *sin* barrier. We do this by sharing the gospel in their context, in a way that "makes sense" within their cultural and intellectual makeup. According to Francis Schaeffer, "[A foreign missionary] must learn the language of the thought—forms of the people to whom one speaks. So it is with the Christian church. Its responsibility is not only to hold to the basic, scriptural principles of the Christian faith, but to communicate these unchanging truths 'into' the generation in which one is living."

If you're a Christian, whether you want to be one or not, you are a missionary and bridge builder. My hope is that you'll respond to the call and use the talents God has given you to further His cause.

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. You can reach him at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Offended by Jesus' Words. . . .

“*d*on't you realize the

Tim Kraus

Pharisees were offended by what you said?” Jesus had been toe-stomping and His disciples were worried. So, they tried a gentle rebuke in order to steer the Master from further inelegance, but it was time to challenge the traditional religious order. Time to call the people back to God's original plan.

Jesus' response to the disciples' attempt to tone Him down? “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides” (Matthew 15:13-14). Doesn't sound very ecumenical, does it? But it does ring true and the time had come for truth to be clearly declared—even if it hurt the feelings of the “clergy.”

Actually, Jesus' tough words about clerical traditionalism *were* jarring. He had replied to their quiz about His disciples' failure to follow established religious tradition by saying, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your traditions?” Ouch! That stung them. But instead of stopping with a vague poke at their foibles, He moved in for the kill.

He first exposed their loophole for countermanding the fifth commandment: “But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradi-

tions” (Matthew 15:5-6).

If that were not enough,

Jesus then went on to quote their favorite prophet in a way that condemned *them!* “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’”

How about *your* faith and practice? Are you obeying God, or is your worship, your concept of Christ, or your life-style and church life the result of human traditions? Do you even *know* what God says about sin, grace, worship and purity of life? We must learn to see our own tendencies to rest comfortably in familiar practice and doctrine instead of challenging ourselves to search the Scriptures more fully.

That tendency scares me. The Pharisees and teacher of the law were generally respected among the people and had both the intelligence and access to Scripture to know what God said. Still, they settled into word-of-God-nullifying traditions. It shows that deception is often garbed in religious respectability. And it usually involves people who are confident, but self-deceived.

When we discover ourselves as brothers to the Pharisees in the way we deal with scriptural mandates, we have two choices. We can, like the Pharisees, take offense at what Jesus says—and try to discredit, censure and extinguish it.

Or, we can repent and obey God.

CHARLOTTE, NC...

"Charlotte Workcamp" is being organized again this year by the *Providence Road church of Christ*. "LAUNCH" weekend will be July 22 & 23. Speakers for LAUNCH include Buddy Bell, Kent Massey, Don McLaughlin and Jeff Walling. As many as three hundred teens and adult chaporons will spend the next four days doing

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PREACHER CHANGES...

Stewart Schnur is the new preacher for the St. Andrews Road church of Christ in Columbia, SC. *Langdon Wilson* is the

new preacher for the Williston, SC church of Christ. *Russ Jurek* is now serving the North Augusta, SC, church of Christ as the pulpit minister. Russ has been serving the congregation as family life minister and marriage counselor. *Phil Stapp* has resigned as the preacher for the Brewer Rd. church of Christ in Winston-Salem, NC, completing a fifteen year ministry there.

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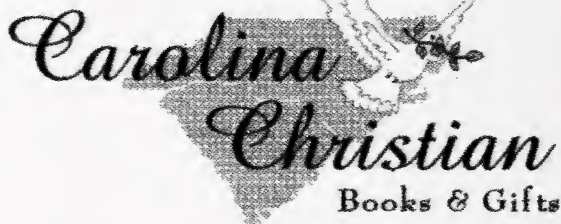
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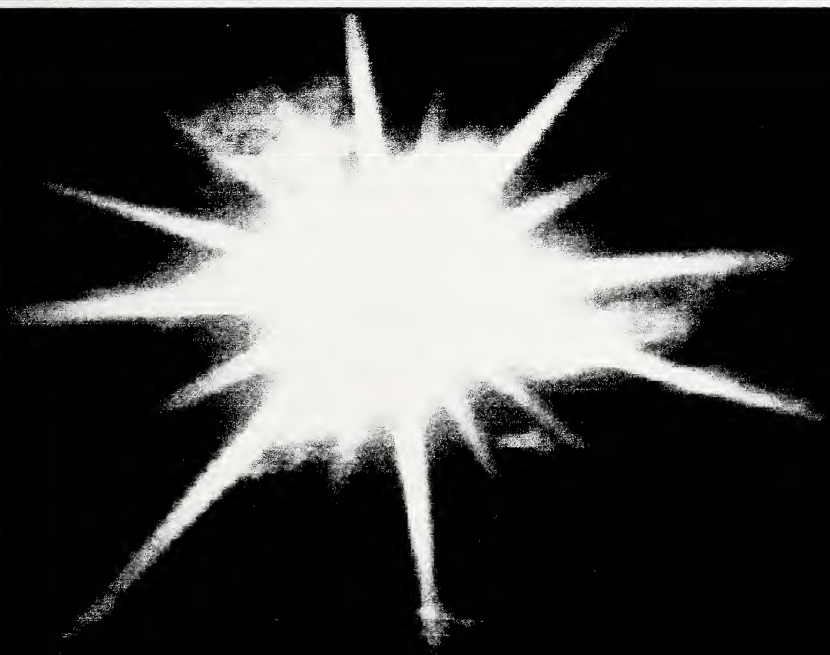
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*"I will Praise You,
For You have answered me,
And have become my salvation"*

Psalms 118:21



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The Fear of Grace.....

Introduce the doctrine of the grace of God into a conversation or Bible class, and note the reactions. Disclaimers. Qualifications. Fear. Fear? Yes, amazingly enough, fear. Ironical, isn't it, that the one doctrine in Scripture that should provide the disciple with utmost confidence (confidence in Christ, not oneself) often produces the opposite effect. Not confidence, but fear. It is a primal fear in the sense that grace strikes at one of man's most basic spiritual instincts: the urge to be good enough to get right with God. It is a misplaced fear.

When grace is emphasized two fearful responses typically surface. The first is the fear that if grace is emphasized, people won't work as hard for the Lord. The reasoning seems to be that if it is strongly preached and taught that our salvation is owing to God's work (in Christ), and not our own, then Christians will slack off and not work as hard. I have encountered this response too many times through the years in too many conversations and classes to dismiss it as an aberration. The truth is, just the opposite holds true.

For instance, in 1 Corinthians 15:8, in the context of Paul's defense of the historical reality of the resurrection of Christ, the apostle notes that the resurrected Christ had also appeared to him. He refers to himself as the apostle who

Dennis Conner

*"Grace did
not result in
less work
from Paul,
but more!"*

had been born "out of due time." In other words, he was a Johnny-come-lately. He also referred to himself as "the least of all the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle" because of his past as a persecutor of the church. However, he argues, "Whatever I am now, I am by the grace of God" (v. 10). The others could claim no station or privilege above Paul, because he "labored more abundantly than them all." Measure Paul's work against theirs and he would have nothing to be embarrassed about. In fact,

he had outworked them all! Next comes the key phrase: "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Could anyone legitimately call into question Paul's commitment, sacrifices, and achievements for the Lord? Absolutely not. And what was the motive that drove him to such diligent labors? Pride? The desire to prove himself deserving of his calling as an apostle? Absurd. What drove him, motivated him and empowered him was nothing less than the grace of God in Christ. Why did he work so hard? Because he remembered what he had once been and what he now was by the grace of God. Grace did not result in less work from Paul, but more! Should it be any different for us?

The second fear is that when grace is emphasized, forgiveness will be cheapened

and moral laxness will result as we "overlook" the sins of others. To the contrary, grace calls for a *heightened* moral accountability. When Jesus finally stood alone with the woman caught in the very act of adultery (her accusers unable to withstand the challenge to let him that had no sin cast the first stone), He did not say to her, "Woman, I forgive you. Now go on and keep living the way you have been." Rather, He said, "I forgive you; go and don't sin anymore" (John 8:11). Jesus treated her with grace, but exhorted her to moral accountability. Paul wrote to Titus that the salvation-bearing grace of God is an instructive grace,

"teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present" time (Titus 2:11-12). Grace, then, when properly preached and taught actually becomes an incentive to holier living and more energetic labor for the Lord. Everything we do is in loving, grateful response to the Father for all that He has done in saving us. God's gracious love toward us inspires laboring, sanctifying love in us.

So, let us proclaim the grace of God with confidence. Let us trumpet its glory. Exult in it. Exalt it. But do not fear it.

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Urgent Need!

The Church and Morality: *Saving Ourselves (4)*.....

Ron Newberry

As we continue to consider the salient points made in David Wells' book *Losing Our Virtue*, let me condense chapter three into a few paragraphs. The theme of the chapter is the efforts we have made as humans to save ourselves. The exact meaning of that term will become clear as you read this month's article.

One of the hallmarks of our age is the flowing current of change that permeates everything around us and thus also everything within us. That is, the cultural changes are not just external events, shifting tides of neutral choices that leave us unaffected. The changes in the post-modern world are affecting how we think about ourselves and the world itself. One of the most important factors effecting change is choice.

The very concept of choice is ingrained in us in our present culture. One example will make the point. What young person is willing to allow his or her parents to arrange a marriage for them? To use Wells' words, "Modernization accelerates our social pluralization" (p. 86). For example, we once had a choice between two or three car manufacturers and only a couple of models with each car maker. Today the choice seems endless. Dozens of companies compete for the market share enticing us to choose

their brand of cereal or their array of lipsticks. (Revlon makes almost 180 shades.) With so many consumer choices from soup to nuts, literally we have also decided that we can choose who we can be in our spiritual lives. The proliferation of religious groups is staggering.

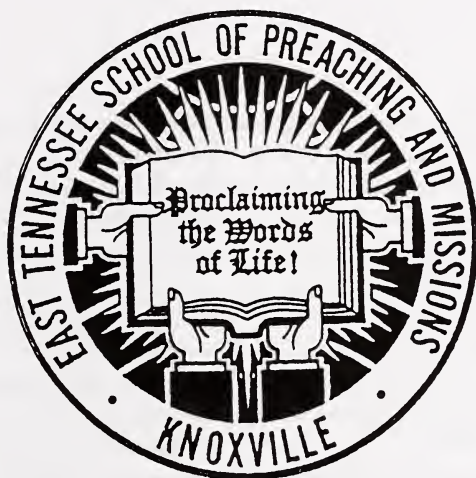
There's a buyer's market in religion. Pluralism is the norm. One result is (as has happened in other domains) style has replaced substance. The

**"ONE RESULT
IS... STYLE
HAS
REPLACED
SUBSTANCE."**

church that can project the most attractive style can be as successful as a major company hawking cookware or AA batteries with satisfied repeat customers.

The whole milieu of our modern culture has resulted in a liberated self. This self-liberation involves a major conceptual shift from character to personality as the essential category for summing up someone. In other words, we are far more interested in personality projections and even personality makeovers than we are character. Think about the following descriptions and see if this is not the case.

Character has to do with honor, reputation, integrity, duty, and the like. Personality is described in terms such as magnetic, forceful, fascinating, dominant, etc. Which is held up as the gold standard for determining who a person is?



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Hollywood stars and politicians (two name only two) are rarely considered to be successful because they have integrity, are honorable, truthful, honest or reputable. Rather they are spoken of and even chosen for their charm, magnetism, forcefulness or attractiveness. In short, attention is "...shifting from moral virtues, which need to be cultivated, to the image, which needs to be fashioned" (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 97).

This major shift has ultimately altered the way we think about happiness, which has become the primary preoccupation of our time. What satisfies us, gives us pleasure or strikes an emotional cord is the primary pursuit of a vast number of Americans. It has certainly permeated the church.

Those with itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3) will seek someone who can scratch them properly and they will not put up with wholesome teaching.

In summary, character has to be trained and involves a moral lifestyle. Personality has nothing to do with the heart, its corruptness or perverted nature. One can be a practicing homosexual, admit the use of illegal drugs and fornicate seven days a week without suffering any revulsion by the public if he writes great music, can act extraordinarily well or can excel in the sporting world. Personality has replaced character.

This extraordinary disconnect between personality and character is crystal clear in the way heroes

have been supplanted by celebrities

and the way villains have all but disappeared. Heroes once personified the traits the culture embraced and promoted. The living embodiment of these traits set a standard for others to emulate and grow taller in their character. Celebrities typically embody nothing of lasting or intrinsic value. They are only famous for being famous. They are hollow caricatures without character having been fabricated by the media; heroes are made by their hard work that contributes to the welfare or benefit of others. Heroes are big people; celebrities are big names. With celebrities replacing heroes, images replacing character, ultimately the commercial replaces the moral. The result is an individualism that eventually breeds lawlessness because morality and character are eventually banished from our culture.

The results of this breach in character development and enhancement of image in our culture has not been the diminishing of shame as many argue. Inward shame grows deeper daily. The problem is there is no moral compass to point us in the right direction or moral fabric to help cover our shame. Our society has thus developed two healers to deal with this predicament: advertising and psychotherapy.

These two saviors are purely secular efforts offering healing on totally secular grounds. They both appeal to the self as the ultimate healer. All the self-help materials inherently contain the assumption that the self carries within it the

means of its own cure. All we have to do is produce the right formula, create the right sequence of stimuli and the potential to heal ourselves is realized. Thus our culture has offered simply a secularized form of salvation.

Coupled with this psychotherapy healer is the healer of advertising. In a nutshell, advertising offers solutions to all our problems by showing us consumer products, which will meet our needs. The underlying assumption is that everyone is searching for something that

will enhance his or her opportunities in life, help them have more fun, be more attractive and fill the emptiness within. Advertisers have become a new priesthood of prosperity without regard to moral underpinning.

We have become consumers to the extreme. We believe that what we need does not have to be created on the inside. Rather it can be purchased, rearranged, dressed up or slipped over the shame.

The result is a love of self that in the end destroys the very thing we love. We have constructed a morally indifferent culture in which the perishing of virtue seems inevitable. By wanting too much we have come to want too little.

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Losers.....

Collecting quotes (or, sometimes, misquotes) is one of my favorite pastimes. I almost always have a notebook close by when I am reading and I usually carry a notepad with me throughout the day to jot things down. (When I forget my notepad I'll write quotes down on business cards, receipts, paper napkins, you name it.)

One of my favorite quotes came from Ted Turner a couple years ago. The ever quotable media mogul quipped "Christianity is for losers." Now, I know what you're thinking. "How could you possibly enjoy such a scandalous claim?" Actually, my first reaction to reading

Turner's statement was negative. I felt indignant and immediately became defensive. I did my best to formulate some appropriate Christian response to his comment.

That's what we've been taught to do, isn't it? Prove our case. Set out our arguments. Win our opponents over through rational discourse or, failing that, at least shout them down.

Unfortunately, my typical reaction is rooted not in my allegiance to God or my faith in Christ, but in my own skewed sense of self-worth. Turner's statement hurts my pride. I've been raised in a culture that values self-confidence over most everything. "Look out for number one." "Be good to yourself." "You've got to believe in yourself first."

Stephen J. Walls-Mathis

This cultural message has slowly crept into my

subconscious, marring my belief and practice. I want to fit in so badly. We all do—isn't that why so many of us pursue misguided efforts at proving that the USA is a "Christian" nation?

The real problem I face is this. Ted Turner is right.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?'" (Matt. 16:24-26).

"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ..." (Phil. 3:8).

Maybe my greatest failing as a "resident alien" in this sinful world is not a failure to correct all the problems I encounter in society. Instead, my greatest failure is the fact that I fit in all too well. Living for Christ, I always lose by the world's standards. When I seek to win at the world's game, then I have stopped living for Christ.

May God grant us the courage to live up to our calling as losers.

Snazzy Title

It's the beginning of summer, and

David Knip

and it's crucial to re-establish some old relation-

ships for the future. There's so much that is wonderful about moving into new times of life; God helps us to mature slowly so that we can handle it. Still, though, it can cause a lot of anxiety.

that means people are dressing up a lot more than they normally do. It seems like there's this banquet, that prom, and someone's graduation party just about all the time. Graduations, whether from elementary school, middle school, or high school, are themselves the strangest part of it all. Besides the funny clothes, you might have family coming in from all over that you haven't seen in years. People give presents, scream when they hear that special person's name, and just generally act differently than they do most of the time.

I encourage you to read 2 Timothy right now. This book tells the story of a young person struggling through a time of transition. His mentor, Paul, someone who has basically adopted him as a son, is about to die. Paul is in prison somewhere, and he and Timothy are separated. Paul has left Timothy with some pretty heavy responsibility – getting a church started – and Timothy's getting anxious.

Don't fret; I promise this is normal. The reason is that graduations are pretty intense times of change. If you've been through one, you know what I mean. If you're graduating from middle school, you might be concerned about finding your way around such a big building or dealing with the peer pressure you've heard is going to get a lot worse. Graduating from high school is big-time scary because you're going off into "the real world." Whether that means college or a job, living at home or away, there are going to be lots of new responsibilities and experiences.

Unfortunately, he's got a good reason. There are people trying to tear the church apart. The first few verses of chapter 3 outlines what's going on in the church, and it's not pretty. People are acting selfishly and in immoral ways; some are even taking advantage of the newest Christians before they have reached a higher level of maturity. Whoever these people are, they are deceivers who are deluding the church away from Jesus Christ.

Don't get me wrong; all of that is really exciting! The celebrations that happen around this time of year are a way that we gain closure on what has gone before and prepare for what's ahead. It's important to see those old friends before going off for the summer or to college,

What's the solution? Paul answers very simply: "Timothy, you are." I'm not sure if Timothy was surprised by Paul's answer or not, but its power ought to make us sit up straight and listen. The answer to the questions Timothy is asking is Timothy himself. And who Paul is directly influences who Timothy is.

Let's see how all this works. Remember what the problems were? False teachers

who are acting in non-Christ-like ways. Solution? "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace..." (2:22). What about the ones who are taking advantage of immature Christians? "Have nothing to do with them" (3:5). Timothy is being challenged and persecuted, and Paul tells him not to worry, for it has happened to all godly people. Timothy needs to stick to the gospel of Jesus; the Bible is his curriculum (3:10-17).

One more difficulty, though: Timothy's not the minister of the church. He's not going to be staying forever. How should he go about making sure things stay on the right track? Paul says to turn the tables. Just as Paul has entrusted Timothy with a "deposit of faith" from God, so should Timothy find godly people to whom he can entrust the gospel of Jesus Christ (2:2).

I do think that 2 Timothy has a lot to

say to us right now. This time of year and of life is one that's full of uncertainty. We don't know what we're going to face in the future. We've heard that life is hard, and that people are going to try to get us to do things we don't want to do, whether that involves ways of acting or thinking. Not to mention, there are people coming up behind us who we want to make sure perpetuate the good things about our church and our school.

So what's the solution, friends? Re-read the book, and I think you'll see that it's the same for us as it was for Timothy: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2:15). That way, someday, we can join Paul in saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (4:7).

Grace and peace to all of you!

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according to the grace given us, let us use them... He whose gift is practical service, let him give himself to serving; he who teaches, to his teaching," (Romans 12:6-7, Amplified Bible).

I knew early in life what my gift was and was not. My second grade report card told me so. Under "Reading" was a little item that read: "Understands What He Reads." I always got A's. I've always liked words and I don't find them difficult to understand. It seemed only logical that I would eventually put that ability to work in teaching.

However, under "Sees and Does Without Being Ordered," I always got PT's, which meant "partially true." Sometimes I would get an F, which just meant "false." It's not that I minded doing things so much; it's just that I never saw what needed to be done.

I left home at 19, when I was still young enough to think I knew more than my mother. Maybe that's why God saw fit to give me a mother-in-law who was a master of practical service. He knew

Rita Watson

someone was going to have to get my head out of the

books every once in a while.

As I have watched Ann go quietly about her life I have learned a few trade secrets for those of us who do not come to "the service of others" so naturally. She taught me that little things do mean a lot. There was always a small gift under the tree at Christmas for whomever might come home unexpectedly. It might not be anything more than "Texas God," (that's pecans, not oil), but you knew she cared about the people you brought home. She would take little Golden Books to the poorer children in her Sunday school class as holiday gifts.

"Mom" also taught that food should be divided. The split cake was her specialty. You bake a cake and divide it in thirds: one third to eat, one third to freeze and one third to give away. The new kids on the block always appreciated it!

"Mema" also understands the gift of time. I've watched her listen to others talk on and on about things that held no interest for her, or sit and color with the grandkids and their friends. I've watched

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her leave her sewing to go with a friend on an errand that was needed.

She understands the importance of the written word. In this day and age of telephone and cell phones and faxes and electronic mail, she still sits to write letters and notes by hand. The first letter I ever received from her finished with these words: "We love you because Del loves you." She had never met me but was willing to love me. I still see those words in her handwriting, assuring me that they came from her and no one else.

I no longer watch Del's mother on a regular basis. She lives in West Texas now while we live in North Carolina. Yet, God continues to send masters my way, for He knows that when your gift is not service, you need constant prodding. Some of them have affected me directly, like Carol, who has popped up at church with a meal for me to take home while I didn't even realize that what I needed was a break from the mundane. Or Mary Jo, who let me vent all my frustrations after having only known me three days and still thought no less of me. Or Ann, who has always had an encouraging word. And all those people who send birthday cards when I don't even remember having one. Nor can I count the number of people who through the years gave us financial help without being asked.

Some masters have affected those around me. My sister's boss, who gave her a card when she left to spend those last days with our brother. It contained two \$50 bills, "just in case." Or the Bailey's

neighbor, who came every evening and cleared away the dishes so they could spend time with their child who was dying with cancer. And Merrill, who always manages to find whatever a person needs.

Others, I have only heard about. And elderly lady had attended the Manhattan Church of Christ for years. None of the classes or sermons affected her, but at last she decided to become a Christian. When asked what had finally brought her to this decision she spoke of several things. Then, with tears in her eyes, she spoke of another Christian, her friend and oftentimes companion. "Yetta," she said, "she holds my hand when we cross the street!" There it was. The little thing that tipped the scale of destiny. All the teaching and all the book knowledge did not have the affect that Yetta's hand holding did.

I will never be a master at service; it's not my gift. Still, I have learned to do a few things and with the gentle prodding of my sisters I am reminded to lift my head from the books to see the job that needs doing, and do it.

Jesus said, "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is my disciple, surely I declare to you, he shall not lose his reward." There will be few in this world who will do great things for the Lord, but all of us can find a place in the ministry of practical service.

Rita Watson can be contacted at 903 Oak St., Marion, NC 28752.

Discontent.....

the tempest of discontent probably rages with more fury in this affluent nation than any other place on earth. It is an evident fact and time tested truth that the more people have, the more they want. True contentment actually depends to a great extent on the things we can do without.

David Macy

this amazing man. Paul's earthly circumstances were

of little concern as long as he was abiding close to the Master. We, too, can learn the lesson of contentment if

we will sit at the feet of the Master and drink deeply of His life giving words.

Contentment comes from within. It is the result of a life which has been committed to Christ and His commandments, not because of what we do or do not have.

"True contentment actually depends to a great extent on the things we can do without."

"Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit," (Ecclesiastes 6:9). I see a vivid contrast between a man like Paul, who was content regardless of the circumstances, and a man who has a wandering desire and is never satisfied (which Solomon aptly labels vanity and vexation of spirit). No doubt Paul had a smiling face, radiant with love for God and his fellow men. The man who is always discontented usually wears a frown and you seldom see the sunshine of love reflecting from his brow, giving light to his stumbling fellow man.

Which man do you want to be like?

The apostle Paul writes, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need," (Philippians 4:11-12). Few people have learned the lesson of contentment like Paul. He was not content because the Lord blessed him with great riches like King Solomon. He was content whether he was full or hungry, whether he was abounding or suffering need. He learned to do without things for his own good, and the good of others.

Paul did not inherit this ability to be content with little or much. It was not a miraculous gift from God. Rather, he learned this lesson from experience as he lived a Christ directed and Christ centered life. Christ was *everything* to Carolina Christian

David Macy preaches for the Murphy Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 4820 Appalachian Highway, Blue Ridge, GA 30513.

...The Apostles and Heart Disease

“**H**ardened heart” usually conjures up images of the all time master of this condition in scripture, Pharaoh of Egypt. Or maybe we think of the Lord’s arch-nemeses, the Pharisees. Never would the Apostles appear in our top ten of “hardened heart” candidates, yet it appears that they did on occasion have bouts with this disease.

The apostles, those twelve hand picked disciples, were not immune to Jesus’ rebukes about this condition. Mark records in his gospel at least three times when our Lord chided them to have a heart checkup because it seemed theirs had hardened. After he fed the five thousand and walked on the water Mark says they could not fathom either event because “...their hearts were hardened.” (Mark 6:52b). Here, early in his ministry, Jesus had to work with men who had heart disease so severe that they could not comprehend the wonders performed before their very eyes! Fortunately for them, and us, Jesus’ compassion and patience did not let this defect disqualify them from his service.

The next heart exam came after Jesus apparently became disgusted with some Pharisaical attitudes and warned the apostles against the “leavening of Herod and the Pharisees.” Having forgotten to bring adequate bread for the trip, their earthly hearts feared that Jesus was angry with them for not carrying enough provisions. Jesus chided them again for their hardened hearts, telling them to recall how many leftovers there were after feeding the five thousand and again after feeding the four thousand. With this he

Richard Boese

reminded them how easily he could handle the physical

dilemma. They were to concentrate on the spiritual problem at hand. (Mark 8:17-21)

The most well known case of a hardened heart among the apostles has to be Judas Iscariot. With Jesus from the beginning of the ministry, witness to all his mighty and generous works, Judas’ heart was unaffected to the point that Satan could move to motivate him to commit the worst betrayal of all time.

Apparently even after Jesus had finished his ministry, died and been resurrected the apostles’ heart condition had not improved. During one of the appearances to the eleven, Jesus had to scold them for their hardness of heart in failing to believe the testimony of those who had reported him to be alive before this visit. (Mark 16:14)

The fact that those who were most intimate with Jesus could have hearts insensitive enough to refuse to let the meaning of their Master’s ministry sink into their heart of hearts should ring siren alarms for us who are two millennia removed from these events. How often do we “hear” the master tell the tale of those self deluded followers in the tale of the sheep and goats (Matt 25) or “see” the hardness of Lazarus’ heart (Luke 16) and yet the significance of the teaching is lost on us. We need to be vigilant in praying to the Lord to apply his healing balm to our hearts so that they might be soft and sensitive to Him.

Richard Boese worships with the South Fork Church of Christ in Winston-Salem, NC. He can be contacted by e-mail at: rdboese@ibm.net.

Contamination Vs. Sanctification...

It is my observation these days that too many Christians are trying to live out the new covenant that is ours in Christ with an old covenant mind set. Here's what I mean by that.

Paul Jarrett

Unfortunately, as noted at the start of this article, many

Under the old covenant given to the Jews on Mt. Sinai, the people of God were to avoid contact with all sorts of things that might render them "unclean," or contaminated. This concept of contamination was in accordance with the purpose of the old law, a law that was given to the Jews to hold them "in custody" (Galatians 3:23) until the new covenant could be realized in Christ. The function of the old covenant restrictions was to prevent the Jews from being contaminated by the sin that abounded in the Gentile world.

However, the new covenant initiated in Christ is not like the old in that the power that resides in the possessors of this new covenant is "greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We must realize that, as a result, we have the potential to sanctify those around us, rather than be contaminated.

This point is illustrated by the way Jesus touched lepers and dead bodies, both of which were viewed as sources of contamination to the Jews. We are called as children of God, and as disciples of Jesus, to cease walking in the fear of contamination by the world's ills and get on with our ministry of healing for those ills. That is the purpose of our sanctification.

Carolina Christian

of us are operating under an old covenant mind set. That is, we don't want to get involved in the messed up lives of the worldly people around us. We keep our distance from them for fear of being contaminated by their sinfulness. However, God has called His people to actively and positively promote sanctification in this world, rather than live in fear of contamination by the world. Instead of seeking to hide from the world, we need to live boldly in the world as the salt and light God has called us to be.

The term "leaven" in Scripture is used to denote influence. It is most often associated with a bad influence and is contrasted with the "unleavened" status to be attained by Christians in keeping with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:8 where he urges us to avoid the leaven of malice and wickedness, partaking instead of the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The church must recognize its responsibility to take the offensive in becoming a sanctifying influence in the world. It is time for the church to live up to its calling to be a sanctifying influence in the world. Rather than living in the fear of contamination, we must go forth with a ministry of purification.

Paul Jarrett is a frequent contributor to Carolina Christian and can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102. He preaches for the Naples Church of Christ.

Just What We've Been Looking For

t

he November 1999
issue of *National*

Danny Boggs

want to believe, then go
looking for reasons to justify

Geographic featured a report on the long-awaited discovery of a transitional creature between dinosaurs and birds. The magazine said, "With arms of a primitive bird and the tail of a dinosaur, this creature found in Liaoning Province, China, is a true missing link in the complex chain that connects dinosaurs to birds." The new discovery was named *Archaeoraptor liaoningensis*.

However, just recently on the *National Geographic* website a headline read, "Dino-Bird Fossil Controversy." It seems the bones of the creature do not comprise one transitional creature. Some of the bones are from an actual bird and the tail is from a dromaeosaurus. *National Geographic* was to print a retraction in the March issue.

Some scientists will pounce on anything that seems to prop up the theory that one species evolved into another.

Unfortunately, science is not the only discipline where some people know what they

their belief. Bible study is often treated the same way. A person decides what he wants to believe then goes looking in the Bible for proof. "Exegesis" is another word for interpretation, meaning basically to take out a text what is there. J.W. McGarvey once wrote, "When the wish is the father to the thought, correct exegesis is like water on a duck's back." In other words, once we decide what we want to believe beforehand, the facts will mean little to us.

Christian life is about sacrificing ourselves to God, knowing and doing *His* will (Romans 12:1-2). We must be careful not to sacrifice the truth of God's Word for our own desires. Our task is not to go to the Bible to find just what we've been looking for. Instead, our aim must be to let the Word of God mold us into just what *He's* been looking for!

Danny Boggs ministers to the Hendersonville church. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

BROTHERHOOD NEWS
- Mark Hudson

CHARLOTTE, NC...

The sisters of the Sugar Creek Church of Christ will host a Ladies Day on September 23, 2000. The theme is "Sisters Blooming Together in Christ: Perennial Living in the Millenium" and the keynote speaker will be Linda Adams of Windermere, Florida. The registration deadline is July 31. For more information call Trina Whaley at (704) 365-6891.

STATESVILLE, NC...

The sisters of the Northview, Highland Acres and Abilene Churches of Christ will jointly host a Ladies Day at the facility of the Abilene church. It is scheduled for September 30, 2000 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The theme will be "Christian Women in Today's World."

THOMASVILLE, NC...

Dale Mitchell is now preaching for the Thomasville Church of

Christ. He comes to Thomasville from Waco, Texas. Dale also works with Eastern European Mission.

MOCKSVILLE, NC...

All past campers at Carolina Bible Camp who have had sister Vivian Bonhanon as a counselor are invited to join her at CBC for her 78th birthday on July 7, beginning at 6:00 p.m. Come and help "Aunt" Viv celebrate.

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down toward Your
holy temple
And give thanks
to Your name
for Your
Lovingkindness
and Your truth**

Psalm 138:2

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The Church and Morality: *Dominance of "Self" (5)*

d

avid Wells
argues in

Ron Newberry

guilty because he has
broken the rule not to

Losing Our Virtue, that our modern world has been both a blessing and a curse. The two sided nature of the dilemma is most evident in modern man's becoming a consumer being who has lost the capacity to see himself as a moral being. Lost in the jungle of 'self'—that there is no reality beyond what is experienced by oneself—man has lost his bearings and no longer understands who he is.

One major consequence of the preoccupation with 'self' is the diminishing of the feelings of guilt. This points to two particular problems which we must address: there is no transcendent point of reference outside of ourselves; and sin is no longer a conceptual possibility. In other words, God is no longer the source of right and wrong, rather what we individually determine is right for us is right; and although sin has not disappeared, our cultural capacity to understand it has vanished. The ultimate result is the attempt to build a kingdom of God without God and to replace his presence on the throne with the 'self'.

This steady movement toward the domination of self in the affairs of life helps explain why the keen observer of our culture has noticed a radical shift away from guilt and the emergence of shame. While our modern culture tends to use these terms synonymously, a distinction needs to be made.

Guilt is the normal emotional response to the infraction of a moral norm. A child steals a candy bar and feels

steal. Shame is our disappointment with self that we are not something other than what we are. The child who steals a candy bar realizes that he is not what his mother taught him to be. In other words, guilt is related to what we do; shame is related to what we are. Guilt is not measuring up to the standards of God; shame is falling short of what we (or others) think we should be. "A person feels guilt because he did something wrong. A person feels shame because something is wrong" (p. 130). Guilt needs forgiveness; shame only needs acceptance (by self or others).

There are times when both guilt and shame are appropriate emotions. The child who steals a candy bar ought to feel guilty for taking what does not belong to him and he ought to feel shame for not living up to a higher standard of life. However, as the difference between these two concepts comes into focus, it is evident why in our particular culture guilt has vanished with the emergence of shame. We do not (speaking of our culture) wish to be held to the moral standards of God. But the shame we feel must be cloaked with acceptance for us to feel like things are all right. (Remember the book *I'm OK, You're OK?*).

One illustration among many may suffice to help us understand the diminution of guilt and increase of shame. The current debate of homosexuality in our culture has moved—or at least the attempt is to move it—out of the arena of a discussion of right or wrong and into the

arena of acceptance, tolerance, open-mindedness, etc. Those who practice a homosexual lifestyle no longer feel guilty, but they do feel shame. They do not wish to view their behavior in light of what God says, rather they want to discuss it in terms of being accepted for who they are. Guilt recedes; shame advances.

Shame is rooted in our sense of exposure, of being uncovered. We have this emotion when others see a side in us that makes us feel vulnerable or chastened. We do not need another party to feel guilty; each is his or her own judge in that case. But shame comes from the disapproval of others. Shame stands as a sentry blocking our private lives from public view. Unfortunately in our culture the reluctance to expose ourselves (literally as well as figuratively) has retreated at an alarming rate.

Inquiring minds want to know all there is to know about everything. The exposure of the private and intimate details of life is not limited to the sexual aspects of our culture although it certainly includes that. This loss of a sense of shame—that some things ought to remain private—has all but melted away. We see it in the courtroom dramas where we get close-up views of grieving parents as a killer is set free. We want to know “How does it feel?” when a tragedy invades a family. We want the tight shot of the athlete’s face as he writhes in agony from a broken leg. We tolerate political leaders who are shameless in both their actions and defense of their actions. Jerry Springer and his ilk get huge ratings because our voyeuristic culture wants to know the intimate details (real or

contrived) of the lives of those who are willing to share them. Both the participants and the viewers are without shame.

If you are still asking, “So what?” let me suggest one ramification of the lack of guilt (which long sense has vanished in our culture because there are few standards for right and wrong) and the loss of shame (which has been slower to abate but nonetheless is slipping away). Both guilt and shame have a tremendous impact on defining who we are at the character level. This sense of character identity requires a kind of consistency on our part. That consistency is seen, for example, in the promises we keep. Kept promises bridge relationships in the realms of ethics and honesty. The one thing that underpins moral identity and character, therefore, is the one thing most in jeopardy in our modern culture: moral principle.

The dilemma in our culture is the creation of a moral vacuum. It is an emptiness that feeds our insatiable appetite of individualism. Moral certainty is pushed farther to the periphery and therefore God (absolute moral certainty) is marginalized to the point of insignificance. In turn, there are fewer imperatives to form the basis for guilt and fewer reservations about exposing that which should bring about shame. The result is the loss of “...both the moral fabric of life and our own identity as moral beings” (p.145).

While the situation described above sounds ominous, it also provides the church with a major opening to reach this generation. We will explore that in the next article.



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Urgent Need!

Revive Us Again.....

In Revelation 2:2-4 the message from Jesus to the church in Ephesus was, "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance...you have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love." The message continues with an exhortation for the church to remember the height from which they had fallen and that they needed to repent; otherwise, their lampstand would be removed from its place. In other words, God would no longer recognize them as a church unless they turned back to Him again. The message implies that they had lost their spiritual fervor and were running on empty. They were just going through the motions because of habit, or tradition. They were no longer excited about worshiping God and received no benefit from doing so. This church was a prime candidate for revival!

The church at Ephesus didn't make a conscious decision one day to just "fall out of love" with the Master. A bride deeply in love with her spouse one night doesn't wake up the next morning not loving him anymore. What happens is that over a period of time the relationship gets taken for granted and becomes neglected and, later on, the couple realize they don't love each other like they did at first. The flame is gone. So it is with our relationship with God. If we just take the relationship for granted it will soon become neglected and the burning love we first had for our Savior will become cold—like the Ephesian church.

In Psalm 85:6 David asks, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may

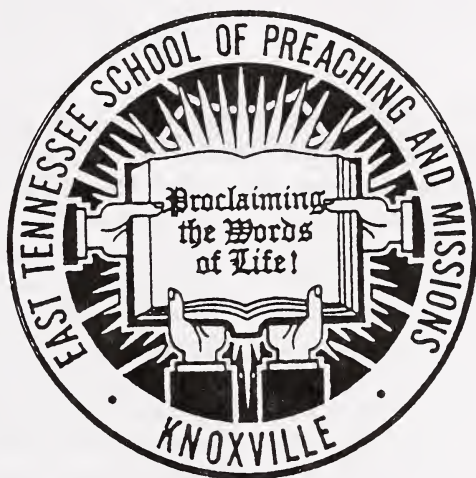
Peter Rode

rejoice in you?" Introspection is always valuable (2 Corinthians 13:5), and perhaps some of us have gotten to the stage where we need to ask ourselves, "Does God need to re-light a fire in me that's getting a little cold?" Revival is experienced when God visits His people to awaken them spiritually. It's not something man does. We sometimes sing the words of the song *Revive Us Again*, "Fill each heart with your love. May each soul be rekindled with fire from above." Revival happens when God visits His people and He wakes them up spiritually.

One of the most famous "revivals" of the twentieth century was the Welsh Revival of 1904-5 when 100,000 people confessed Christ in five months. They had to start closing down bars because no one was going to them. So many miners were converted to Christ that he mules didn't know what to do—they could only work when cursed—and much of the work in the coal mines of the region came to a stand still. The Welsh Revival was described as, "The churches are full of people, and the people are full of God." The best definition of revival is found in the Bible in Acts 3:19 where Peter says, "Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out so that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Revival is a time of refreshing that comes from the Lord as He wakes up His people. He rekindles the fire of the Holy Spirit in their souls.

Come Holy Spirit!

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.



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The Goodness of God.....

"He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord," (Psalm 33:5).

Evidence of the goodness of God is everywhere. The sunshine and he rain, beautiful trees and flowers adorning magnificent hills and valleys, majestic mountains filling our hearts with wonder and awe. We can see the goodness of God in our childrens' smiling faces and the glow of love from our faithful companions. We can see His goodness in dear friends and neighbors who genuinely care about us. We see God's goodness in the assembled church where we get a little taste of heaven and find strength to face the trials and tribulations of this present world. Even when we are sick and hospitalized, we experience the goodness of God as we realize as never before how many people truly love us. We may have entered full of anxiety, but he prayers of the saints prevailed. But the greatest thing about God's goodness is the fact that it leads those who are receptive to it to repentance and salvation.

Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "Or despiseth thou the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). The gospel is the story of God's goodness manifested through His beloved son, Jesus Christ. This is the story that touches good and honest hearts and moves them to believe in Jesus and surrender to Him in

David Macy

trusting obedience that they might be saved. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the result of that precious truth revealed in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." When honest hearted people fully realize that God was good enough to send His only Son to die for their sins, they will then joyfully believe in Jesus, repent of their sins, confess Jesus before men and then be united with Him in baptism, coming into contact with the cleansing blood of Christ. They will want to walk each day with the One who is so loving and kind and good.

There is nothing like the goodness of God. Find out for yourself!

David Macy ministers to the Murphy Church of Christ in Murphy, NC. He can be contacted at Macy International, 4820 Appalachian Highway, Blue Ridge, GA 30513.

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What's That Smell?

t

ake a moment
with me and think

David Kneip

Paul defend himself against
people who were attacking

about smells. What's your favorite smell in the world? For me, pine needles, my mother's cooking, and trees blossoming in the spring have to be right up there. What about your least favorite smells? Cooked broccoli, brussel sprouts, and skunks rate near the top of my list.

Let's go a little further. What do you smell like right now? Are you somebody's favorite smell? If you just got off the basketball court, probably not. But maybe if you've climbed out of the bathtub you smell a little better. A little perfume (or cologne, as the case may be) doesn't hurt. And maybe some deodorant. It's funny how we can smell radically different to different people at different times of the day.

One more question: how do you smell spiritually? I'm being serious here. My question comes from a great passage in 2 Corinthians 2: 14-17: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in victory through Christ. God uses us to spread his knowledge everywhere like a sweet-smelling perfume. Our offering to God is this: we are the sweet smell of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are being lost. To those who are lost, we are the smell of death that brings death, but to the ones who are being saved, we are the smell of life that brings life...in Christ we speak the truth before God, as messengers of God."

Now this passage originally helped

him. Some folks in the church in Corinth didn't think that Paul was very much of a minister; he didn't speak well and his qualifications for ministry weren't quite up to the level they wanted. Paul, though, reminded the people that when it comes to ministry, the work is not about the minister, but about the God who equips them. That's where that famous verse in chapter four comes in: "We have this treasure from God, but we are like clay jars that hold the treasure. This shows that the great power is from God, not us." Paul went on to explain how his own clay jar was broken, beaten, cracked, perplexed, persecuted, etc. However, he didn't give up his ministry, knowing that the important thing was the treasure in the jar, not the jar itself.

I think that idea hits us right where we are. I don't know about you, but my clay jar is prettybeaten up. I struggle with sin every day. I've lost loved ones, moved away from very dear friends, and I have bad knees. My grandmother is struggling with Alzheimer's. A good friend in Abilene is in his early 30's and can't use his right arm because of Parkinson's disease. How are you a broken jar today? Where are the cracks? Do you try to hide them, or are they visible for everyone to see?

Those cracks are a part of who we are. Lots of us spend a lot of time trying to mend our cracks, to patch our holes, and to cover up our blemishes the way you

put your bed over the stained place on the carpet, or hang a picture over the hole in the wall. I know that what has broken you may be something you're really ashamed of, but God will use that. You may have been the victim of some serious clay-jar-damage by other people; trust me, God will use that, too. He loves to take the places where we are most weak and make them the foundations of our strength.

So let me ask you again: how do you smell spiritually? I know your clay jar is broken, but remember, that's not the important thing. The important thing is

the treasure we hold in the little jars that are our lives. I believe that God has equipped us all to be his ministers, and He wants us to be mature spiritually. As we grow, we smell sweeter and sweeter to God and to those who are being saved. Now, unfortunately, you may find that you smell less and less desirable to others as you grow closer to God—that's the smell of death part. Just keep focused on the treasure that you hold and live out the Christ life in front of others, and you will be at the top of God's "favorite smell list."

Let's try it together.



Bobby and Judy Graham.

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Bobby and Judy Graham are from Long Island, New York. They came to SIBI to equip themselves to share the gospel. They plan to spread the gospel in Ohio.

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He Who Lives

“I

I am He who lives,
and was dead, and
behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.”
(Revelation 1:18).

Dennis Conner

John truly shared the pain
of his suffering brothers

As John took his pen in hand, dark days were facing the church. Domitian was the emperor, and he was cruel and relentless in his persecution of Christians. What word could he give to these suffering and frightened believers? What hope could he offer them in order to sustain them? It would be the word that years earlier had lifted his own spirit. It would be the word that “Jesus lives.”

In the Crucible

As John wrote he assured his readers that they were not alone. In verse 9 he identified himself as their “brother and companion in tribulation.” Very simply, he knew their pain. He himself had been banished to Patmos for the “crime” of unfailing loyalty to the word of God and commitment to Jesus. The life of banishment was not in any way an easy one. Sir William Ramsey described it as being “preceded by scourging, insufficient food, sleep on the dark ground, a dark prison, and work under the lash of the military overseer.” Yes, the aging apostle knew firsthand the pain and pressure of persecution. His word to these suffering believers was not the word of one who observed their distress from a safe distance. Rather, he spoke as a participant, a true kindred spirit. Has someone ever told you, “Oh, I know how you must be feeling,” and wanted to tell them, “You have no idea what I’m feeling”?

and sisters.

Yet, he never cracked. Why?

In the Presence

As John continued to write he recalled one particular Lord’s day when he was in the Spirit. He heard a loud voice behind him, distinctive and clear as a trumpet, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.” He then turned to look in the direction of the source of the voice, only to find himself in the presence of the glory of the risen Christ! He was dressed in a robe of royalty with a golden belt around his chest (symbols of power and kingly rule); His purity manifested in head and hair that were white like wool, like freshly fallen snow; and eyes like a flame of fire, able to peer into the very depths of a soul. His feet were like fine, burnished brass (an Old Testament symbol of the dispenser of God’s wrath) and in His hand He held seven stars (the seven churches of verse 11). Out of His mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword (reminiscent of Hebrews 4:12). And His face—full of the glory of the heavenly—shone like the sun in its fullness.

John was in the presence of the holy, and it was more than his human frame could endure; he fell in a dead faint.

The Comforting Word

Then, there was the touch of a hand on his shoulder—the same compassionate hand that John had seen reach out to so many others years earlier—and the voice of

the glorified Christ spoke these words of comfort and assurance, "Do not be afraid..." But why should he not be afraid? "I am He who lives...I am alive forevermore."

And there it is! The word that John would give to his suffering, frightened readers would be this word: "Jesus lives!" Difficult times were upon them, and it was about to get worse. But Jesus lives! At times it would seem as if Satan was about to succeed in his evil war waged against the church, but he would not, for Jesus lives! Believers would be tempted to deny Christ, but they were reminded to be faithful, for Christ had broken the bonds of death. Christ would be victorious, because not even death could hold Him,

or them, captive. Hence, they would be victorious.

The book of Revelation was, and is, a word of assurance to all those caught in the press of persecution, oppression, injustice, and pain. Overwhelmed by your burdens? Life tumbling in? Ever ask yourself, "What's the use?" Tired of the struggle? Weary of being beaten down for standing up for what is right? Then enter into the presence of the Christ who lives. Remember that no pain is permanent, no threat from the world has substance, no failure is final, and not even death itself is to be feared. The Christian will always be victorious. Why? Because Christ is alive *forevermore* and the hand of the risen Christ rests upon us.

The Providence Road church of Christ (a congregation of approximately 1,000 members) is seeking a person with the heart of Jesus and a passion for children to lead our rapidly growing children's ministry. Responsibilities will include coordinating all teaching and special ministries for children and families from birth through fifth grade. We are searching for someone who has strong Bible knowledge, a motivator, an energetic team player with excellent communication skills. Creativity and strong organizational skills are considered a plus for this position. Professional qualifications include extensive experience working with children and a college degree (preferably in early childhood education, children's ministry or a related field). References must be provided. If interested please send resume or call for additional information.

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Back to the Simple Things.....

opsicles on a
hot summer

Tim Kraus

and kneel down to see the
world from a child's view.

day. Balancing on a log across a swift creek. Kites soaring in the spring winds. The delicate meowing of those newborn kittens. Remember how those things used to capture your fancy when you were a child? Children are that way; they appreciate the simple things.

Most of us have outgrown that child-like virtue. Sad. Now it's cars, VCRs and SUVs, and expensive vacations. And they don't satisfy like our childhood diversions, regardless of their cost. Oh, for a return to the innocence of childhood! Perhaps then we could really enjoylife.

Maybe that's what Jesus meant. His words point us to the simple innocence of a child: "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 18:-4).

Put on the brakes. Slow down and experience the joy of simple things again. Humble yourself "like a child"

: Judge your net worth on the basis of
: relationships, not financial assets.
: Confess your weakness and seek a
: closeness with your Father.

: Kingdom of heaven citizens enter
: by submission, not by conquest.
: Instead of waving certificates of
: personal achievement in the face of
: God, they joyfully accept His loving
: gift of forgiveness in Christ. They learn
: to lay aside their own cleverness and
: accept the wisdom of God.

: A return to innocence; that's what it
: means to be in the kingdom of heaven.
: Eager to learn from God, willing to
: obey, joyfully telling others of His love,
: we thus learn to restore the best of
: childhood. Then we can appreciate the
: little things again. A kind word. A
: simple prayer. Sounds of our Father's
: world. Trustworthy friends who inspire
: pure lives.

: Open your heart to the simple
: things. Come to God as a child. There
: you'll find the kingdom.

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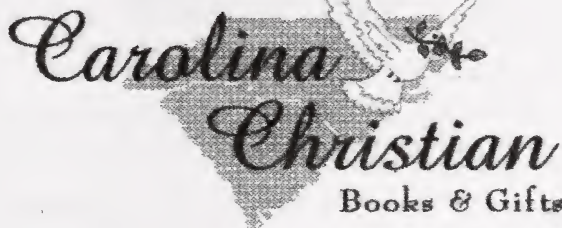
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America is Laughing

(Editor's Note: The following article appeared in *Family*

Focus, a publication of the Fairview Road Church of Christ in Columbia, Missouri shortly after the infamous show, "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire" appeared on the Fox Network.)

Eddie Randolph

Comedians, talk shows, news magazines and

almost everyone else have found fodder for jokes.

America is laughing.

Personally I think we should be in tears.

Well, at least a good number are snickering. The Fox Network's new hit show, "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire," left the TV network with egg on its face. An audience of twenty-two million tuned in to watch Rick Rockwell pick a wife from a pool of fifty women who agreed to marry Rockwell on the spot if he selected them. In a format that combined elements from "The Dating Game" and "The Miss America Pageant," Darva Conger was selected to be the bride in a made-for-TV marriage. They were immediately married by a Las Vegas judge and hurried off on a honeymoon to the Caribbean.

The new marriage began to crumble as word spread that a restraining order had been issued against Rockwell in 1991, alleging threats and violence against an ex-girl friend. That fact was missed in the show's required background check. Now, even his multimillionaire status is in question. The Fox Network is in damage control mode. Plans to rebroadcast the rating bonanza have been scrapped. An annulment seems to be on the horizon (an option agreed to in advance).

Carolina Christian

It is no secret that marriage has become a disposable commodity in America. In her book, *The Divorce Culture*, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead criticizes American's penchant for divorce from a sociological perspective. She makes a powerful case for the positive effects marital stability and the corrosive nature of our sky-high divorce rate has on our society. Whitehead declares, "Divorce is now part of everyday American life. It is embedded in our laws and movies and television shows, our novels and children's storybooks, and our closest and most important relationships." She adds, "Divorce moved from the margins to the mainstream of American life in the space of three decades." (*The Divorce Culture*, pp. 1, 3). Whitehead traces the seeds for divorce through the American experience as Americans began to change their ideas about an individual's obligations to family and society to focus on an obligation to self. The result is a divorce rate that was once unthinkable and public anxiety about such a statistics has all but vanished. Spectacles like, "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire" are just symptoms of the problem.

Jesus addressed the issue in his time too. His culture faced the scandal of divorce, especially among those considered to be religious leaders. In trying to draw him into the rabbinical debates of the day, they quizzed Jesus about the lawfulness of divorce and quoted God's words to Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to support their position. Jesus responded, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law...But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:1-9).

Too frequently, these cultural values invade and destroy what should be in Christian homes. The people of God must set an example for the rest of our culture. It is more than preaching a strong message. It includes developing healthy marriages and families that are based on selfless love and mutual submission as we live in submission to God.

If America laughs, let it be from joy rather than scorn.

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The Ethiopian Work: *A Mission Model*

“Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God,” (Psalm 68:31).

Truitt Adair

The ancient biblical land of Cush was the home of Moses' wife, the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Queen of Sheba, and is today the site of one of the fastest growing mission efforts in modern times. From its humble beginnings in 1960 until the last American missionaries left in 1974, a number of Americans representing both predominately black and predominately white congregations served the friendly and receptive people of this east African nation. War-torn and known more for famine than faith by most Americans, Ethiopia has none-the-less become a proving ground for a very effective mission model.

In the first few years of the work a traditional missionary-dominated model was pursued, but gradually the change was made to a training model in which more responsibility was given to national church leaders. The first group of Ethiopian preachers was trained in 1968. The resident American missionary presence began to be phased out and the last missionary left Ethiopia in 1974. At that time there were less than a dozen congregations in the country. Today there are more than 600 congregations and possibly as many as 65,000 members of the church. Most congregations have fewer than 100 members, but there are a good number of congregations with between 400 and 600 members and a couple which number near 1000. More than 400 preachers have been trained to evangelize and plant new churches and at least 60 congregations have elders.

A number of people and factors have been used by God to contribute to such phenomenal growth. At least three factors are significant for the past, present and future growth of God's kingdom in Ethiopia.

A Ministry of Compassion.

The early missionaries in Ethiopia were told by the government that they must

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contribute to some physical need in order to stay and preach. Since no work was being done among the deaf in Ethiopia our brethren founded the first deaf school in the country. We currently train more than 350 deaf children in three schools. The deaf sign language used in Ethiopia was developed by our brethren and most teachers in Ethiopia's other deaf schools were trained in our schools. Also, during two devastating famines our brotherhood sent millions of dollars in aid to Ethiopia. We were among a very small number of government-authorized relief agencies and as such managed and distributed over \$19 million worth of supplies, equipment, food and clothing and also supervised the digging of numerous water wells. Countless thousands of lives were saved by these efforts and the Lord's church was given credibility with the government and the people. Evangelism was combined with the relief efforts so that they church grew even during a major famine and seventeen years of oppressive communistic government.

World Bible School

Thousands of World Bible School courses are being taught in English by hundreds of American teachers. Other courses are distributed in the Amharic language of Ethiopia by the WBS office in Addis Ababa, the capital city. New frontiers for the church are constantly being opened as a result of WBS contacts. Ethiopian preachers frequently conduct WBS follow-up campaigns in unevangelized areas as one of their major evangelistic methods. Recently while visiting in Ethiopia to attend the wedding of a relative, two Christian sisters from Bermuda were trying to teach God's word to the taxi driver who took them to the wedding. He told them that he was already studying the Bible by correspondence and showed them his WBS material. He may even now be our brother in Christ!

Preacher Training

The preacher training program in Ethiopia is now conducted as a branch of Sunset International Bible Institute, but a great debt of gratitude is owed to those early Ethiopian missionaries who began to train national preachers. Graduates of that first preacher training class serve today as key leaders in the mission efforts of the church in Ethiopia. Behailu Abebe, one of those graduates, is among the finest church leaders in any culture. He has been awarded honorary doctor's degrees from two Christian universities based on his thirty-year ministry. Currently 125 preachers per year are being trained at campuses in Jajura, Sentoria and Addis Ababa.

More than 95% of the preachers in Ethiopia are either self-supporting or are supported by Ethiopian congregations. One of the greatest financial needs right now in the preacher training program is for individuals and congregations who will provide the room and board expenses of the preacher trainees during their school terms. The Ethiopian churches that send students to the school also support their families and pay the student's transportation to the school. They are not asking us to support their preachers, but just for our help in training them.

A second financial need is for travel expenses for Sunset faculty members and other qualified teachers who go to Ethiopia to help train the Ethiopians who will be teaching in the preacher training program. A third pressing need is for a congregation to

accept the challenge of providing the printing expense for teaching materials currently being translated into the Amharic language. Bible study materials are desperately needed for the edification, maturing and training of Ethiopia's churches and preachers.

In order to meet the growing needs of new congregations and expanding evangelistic work we need to double the preaching force of Ethiopia in the next five years. Sunset International Bible Institute and World Bible School are working with Ethiopian personnel, supporting congregations and former missionaries to Ethiopia to help meet the challenge of preacher training and church planting. John E. Clark of Fresno, CA serves as Field Representative for the Ethiopian work. Those interested in becoming partners in the work can contact him through Sunset International Bible Institute.

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COLUMBIA, SC...

The Palmetto Church of Christ hosted Dr. Carl Breechen and his wife, Smitty, in a one day Parenting Seminar on June 24.

RALEIGH, NC...

The Mid-Atlantic Evangelism Seminar will be hosted by the Brooks Ave. Church of Christ September

8-10. The theme is "But First Comes a Dream." Keynote speakers include Randy Harris, Joe Beam and Floyd Rose. For information call (919) 821-2400 or visit their website at www.brooks.org.

CHARLOTTE, NC...

The annual Carolina

Men's Leadership Retreat will be October 27-28, 2000. The featured speaker will be Jim McGuigan.

(Special news items and church bulletins may be sent to Mark Hudson, 2006 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803. E-mail: mrhudson@aol.com)

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Sound Doctrine:

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The High Impact Church

(Matthew 5:13-16)

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here is a *Peanuts* cartoon that

Dennis Conner

we must engage the world.

That is, we must get

showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown on the first day back at school. "Guess what, Chuck. The first day of school and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault, Chuck." "My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?" Charlie Brown asked incredulously. "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a better influence on me."

Peppermint Patty may have been trying to pass the buck, but there is a sense in which she was right. We should be a positive influence on those around us. As a matter of fact, that is what Christ calls us to in this text. We are called to have a definite, visible, lasting effect on our culture. However, many churches today are impotent and ineffective, having little effect on their own members, much less being a force for impact and change in the world. Truth to tell, they doubt seriously their own ability to have an influence for good in the world. However, in Jesus' words there is no skepticism or doubt; only optimism and challenge. He doesn't say, "You should be salt and light," or "maybe you could be salt and light." Rather, He says, "You *are* salt and light." Jesus intended for His church to be a visible, powerful influence in the world.

If we are indeed to faithfully fulfill that calling, there are two fundamental truths in this text we must come to grips with.

First, in order to influence the world

out of our comfort zones and into the world. We cannot be an influence by observing from the outside. It may seem simplistic, but in order to change our world we must get out into the world. In her book *Out of the Saltshaker*, author Becky Pippert says, "If salt stays in the saltshaker, then it's just a table ornament." In observing the church's hesitancy to engage its culture, Jay Mitchell observes, "...Instead of moving into their world we close ourselves off from them—we build walls of judgment and fear and labels that keep those people away from us—so we won't get infected by their problems or lifestyle. The result is: we stay 'pure' while people are headed for a Christless eternity unless someone reaches them where they are..." Many churches are content to sit still, safely hunkered down in their comfortable buildings, expecting the world to move toward them; but Jesus Himself has modeled for us a different strategy. He moved out into the world and engaged the people where they were.

To emphasize this truth, the Lord used two metaphors that even the poorest and most simple of listeners would have recognized: salt and light. Every household used salt and possessed a lamp. These images highlight the church's two roles in society:

(1) *To arrest decay.* In those ancient times they had no way of refrigerating food in order to preserve it, so they would use salt. While salt was used to flavor food, it's main use was as a preservative,

and that is likely what Jesus had in mind here. Then, as now, the world was a rotting, decaying place. Left in its natural state, humankind always pursues that which results in its own spiritual and moral deterioration. Left to ourselves, we are a self-destructive lot. Jesus calls us to engage this putrid and decaying mass of humanity and to be salt, to be a *preserving* influence in the world. The world needs us to live out our faith in its midst. The world does not need a silent church or a timid church or a self-centered church. It needs us, by our lifestyle and ministry, to do all we can to slow the decay and preserve all that is good and right. The world needs us to be involved and caring.

Second, our role is to dispel the darkness. The fundamental purpose of light is to dispel darkness, to show the way. As a matter of fact, the darker it is, the more effective light is. Paul told the church in Philippi that we are to be “lights in the middle of a dark and crooked generation.” Throughout the New Testament “darkness” is used as a symbol of the deceit, the spiritual blindness and the death that characterizes life in the world.

Now, understand that we are not light *generators*, but we are light *reflectors*. That is, what light we are does not originate with ourselves. We reflect the light of God and the light of Christ.

Jesus is “the light that has come into the world.” Our lives and ministries are to reflect His light, showing the world that there is a way—a better way—through the darkness. In this world that lies in the grip of the prince of darkness, we are called to proclaim the Lord of Light.

Carolina Christian

Someone has said that “it does little good to curse the darkness; one should light a candle.” It does little or no good to sit back and whine and complain about the sad state of the world. The good comes in being a light.

The world is spoiling and dark, and we represent it’s only hope. The world needs us to be salt and light.

Second, if we are to have an influence, not only must we make contact with the world, but we must maintain our Christlike distinctiveness even as we do so. As salt we must not lose our savor; as light we must be allowed to shine. We must not allow anything to compromise our effectiveness in the world.

In ancient Palestine much of the salt people used (such as that found on the shores of the Dead Sea) was contaminated with gypsum or other materials that made it taste flat or that made it ineffective as a preservative. When a batch like that was found, it was thrown out. But they would not throw it out into the garden, where it would kill healthy vegetation. Instead, they would throw it out onto a path or road where it would eventually be ground into the dirt and disappear. Once it lost its essence, it was no longer good for anything but road materials!

In the same way, we must be careful to maintain our distinctively Christlike lives in the midst of an unholy world. Christian saltiness is our Christian character. We must not allow ourselves to be corrupted by the lifestyle and values of the world.

Many churches are ineffective because they measure success by the same standards by which the world seeks and



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measures success. Their ministries are little more than confirmations of peoples' worldly ambitions and appetites. Many Christians individually have allowed themselves to be corrupted by worldly ambitions, appetites, and attitudes. When that happens, our salt loses its influence and is no longer good for anything.

Further, a light that is hidden, for whatever reason, is useless. It makes no sense, Jesus said, to light a light and then stick a bushel basket over it! Yet, when we allow our lives to be co-opted by the world, that is the effect.

Tragically, it is getting more and more difficult to distinguish between Christians and people in the world. Is Jesus

calling us to a smug "holier than thouness?" No, but He is telling us that we must maintain His likeness in our lives. We must strive to be holy as God is holy. We must live and serve in a way that convicts people in the world of their sin and their need for a Savior. As John R. W. Stott has written, "If we are indistinguishable from non-Christians, we are useless."

And why are we to be such clearly distinguishable lights? Why must we be diligent to maintain our effectiveness? What is our purpose as a church? Why do we exist? So that the world may see, with the result that God is glorified. Jesus makes it very clear: high impact churches and disciples bring glory to God!

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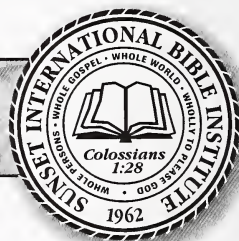
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The Church and Morality

The Other Perspective (6)

If you have followed the previous five articles based on interaction with and reflection upon David Wells' book *Losing Our Virtue*, then you are probably aware that we have had a rather asymmetrical analysis of the modern culture. That is, we have looked only at the rather negative, bleak perspective of the way we are in the year 2000 A.D. The bridge between law and freedom has been washed out. We are wandering aimlessly in the wilderness of amorality. We have come to banish guilt from our minds because we have erased sin from our vocabulary. Shame, which stood for generations along with guilt as sentries to our hearts, has been essentially eradicated like an invading pest and treated as a malfunction of the human mind. What guilt remains has been secularized to the extent that we do not look for relief in terms of atonement, but rather from techniques born of psychology or advertisement.

The above paragraph is the essence of the previous articles on the Church and Morality. The other perspective begins with understanding the dilemma of what M. Scott Peck calls in his book *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, deliberately sustained amnesia (p. 72). Peck argues that it is not that we have lost our ability to understand that we have sinned against God and, therefore, stand guilty before him, it is that we have accepted as normative the deliberate repression of guilt.

People who refuse to tolerate the agony

Ron Newberry

of restraining themselves in the pursuit of "life" have become "people of the lie." There may remain a semblance of shame, but there is an unwillingness to accept guilt. Peck observes that the essence of evil is not the absence of sin or the imperfections common to man. The essence of evil is the unwillingness to tolerate the sense of sin. Unlike the psychopath who has no sense of wrong, modern man has continually swept the evidence of guilt under the rug of his consciousness (p. 76).

Could this help explain the dynamic so evident in those who will not tolerate the scrutiny of their moral lives? What is that dynamic? They spend inordinate amounts of time and energy cultivating their image. (If you have it, reread the article on character and personality.) Wells argues that this supercharged effort to build up the image is a counterweight to their knowledge – even though they tenaciously try to deny it – that they are moral beings. They construct elaborate

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facades to project the right image. Unfortunately their decency is all on the surface.

That is why they are people of the lie. They are narcissistic moral agents who deny and subjugate that moral nature. It is precisely at this point that we encounter as enigma that lies at the heart of life. On one hand, we observe the constant and relentless erosion of life as a result of modernization. On the other hand, we experience our inner world of moral awareness. We are part of two worlds. Despite all the screaming of the modernists to the contrary, we are moral beings and that sense of morality is woven into the fabric of our lives. There is part of us that remains – that part created in the image of God – which battles with the sinful nature. As moral beings we struggle with the immoral world. In fact, the enigma is the harder we try to develop the image, the personality, the persona on the outside, the more it demonstrates our awareness of the moral being within which the modern culture is attempting to squelch. However, this sense of the moral woven into the fabric of our hearts will not go quietly. It is unlikely that we are prone to thinking in this way. Let me encourage you to see things from this perspective for a change. Consider, for example, the news broadcast this evening. What is usually presented? What do you remember from the previous broadcasts? You probably are thinking about all the mayhem and violence of gang shootings, mass murders in an African country,

starvation, riots, drive-by shootings, ethnic cleansing, clashes in the Middle East, etc. The question is, “Why is this considered news?” Could it be that in spite of their frequency and brutality there is part of us that refuses to accept these as normal? It is news because it is not the norm. At least these events cut across the grain of what we know should be. There is an innate sense buried within the human heart that knows that something is not right when moral atrocities are perpetrated especially upon the innocent. There are moral intuitions that create currents that push us back toward the center of how life ought to be lived. The battle between these two forces – the deliberate repression of guilt and the intrinsic sense of our moral nature – is evident in any number of arenas.

Perhaps the most obvious is the abortion issue. In an attempt to deal with guilt (a sense of violation of a code of conduct) abortion supporters have tried to remove the laws that would be violated in an abortion. Even if the guilt could be totally assuaged, there is the matter of shame (a sense of not living up to what he or she should be).

To alleviate the sense of shame, the cloak of “pro choice” has been used to put those who denounce abortion on demand on the defensive as being anti choice. It is a clever ruse, but one that does not work either on a moral or a practical level. The flaw in the practical arena is evident in broadcast after new broadcast. When it suits their purpose,

newscasters refer to the unborn as a fetus. However, when the topic is one other than abortion, the unborn is a child or a baby. Even the pop icon Madonna is pregnant with a baby not a fetus. The point is, try as they might, the media are unable to filter out every reference to moral conclusions. The culture cannot eliminate the sense that we are moral beings. No matter how deeply it is buried it always claws its way to the surface.

What about all the reprobates? What about those who murder, cheat, lie and are cowards? They do not invalidate the case for our having a moral sense about

us. In fact, because we see the moral unevenness in life we recognize that those who violate these norms are culpable and even wicked.

The above arguments are not meant to imply that the moral sense we possess as humans created in the image of God needs no training. To the contrary, it needs proper training. It needs nurturing, which is what we will explore next time. The point I simply want to make here is that this sense of right and wrong is actually rooted in our nature as humans. Give that some more thought.

The Providence Road church of Christ (a congregation of approximately 1,000 members) is seeking a person with the heart of Jesus and a passion for children to lead our rapidly growing children's ministry. Responsibilities will include coordinating all teaching and special ministries for children and families from birth through fifth grade. We are searching for someone who has strong Bible knowledge, a motivator, an energetic team player with excellent communication skills. Creativity and strong organizational skills are considered a plus for this position. Professional qualifications include extensive experience working with children and a college degree (preferably in early childhood education, children's ministry or a related field). References must be provided. If interested please send resume or call for additional information.

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Sound Doctrine: Studies in Titus

a concern for proper doctrine has been foundational to our heritage in the churches of Christ. That's as it should be, since it is an important New Testament theme. In recent years, however, two extremes regarding sound doctrine have emerged. On the one hand, there are some who have pursued and promoted it with such passion that they have lost all sense of civility in the process. In some circles, kindness and mutual respect have been sacrificed on the altar of "correctness." Others, on the other hand, have reacted to the heartlessness of this extreme with disdainful disregard for the expression "sound doctrine." Both err in that they tend to understand "sound doctrine" in primarily intellectual terms, contrasting it to spiritual life.

In reality, doctrine and life are complementary elements. Properly understood, true doctrine is life-giving. Nowhere is this truth in greater evidence than in the little book of Titus, where doctrine is not only a matter of the intellect, but of lifestyle.

The three articles that follow were all penned by Paul Jarrett, preacher for the Naples church of Christ in Naples, Florida. Prior to his ministry in Naples, brother Jarrett served the Archdale church in Charlotte for almost ten years. We hope our readers benefit from brother Jarrett's insightful articles, in which he seeks to inject a needed sense of balance into current discussions.

Sound Doctrine Defended: Titus, Chapter One

Paul Jarrett

Paul's epistle to Titus deals with a subject of great interest to many Christians—sound doctrine. The literal meaning of the Greek words translated as "sound doctrine" is *healthy words*. In the second article in this series we will be looking at how Paul defines sound doctrine in the second chapter of Titus. In this initial article, however, I want to look at how sound doctrine is to be defended.

When we think of defending sound doctrine our first thought is often to offer a verbal defense. While there is certainly a place for making an oral defense of sound doctrine, the real defense does not begin with words. The ultimate defense of sound doctrine begins when we exhibit a healthy lifestyle (read 1 Peter 3:15-16).

The importance of defending sound doctrine by means of the testimony of our good behavior helps us to understand why Paul placed great emphasis in Titus¹ on the character of those who are appointed to lead God's people. They were not to be self-willed, quick-tempered, addicted to wine, pugnacious, or fond of sordid gain. They were to be hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, and self-controlled. The character of the elders whom Titus was to ordain in Crete was to stand in stark contrast to the average

Cretans, whom one of their own prophets had described as "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

In writing to another young preacher Paul had appealed to his own conduct as evidence of the soundness of his teachings as opposed to the teaching of others (see 2 Timothy 3:9-14). This contrast might be compared to two diet programs: one being promoted by a man who is overweight and out of shape, and the other being advertised by a man who

"When we think of defending sound doctrine our first thought is often to offer a verbal defense."

is fit and trim. Which diet program are you going to want to follow?

In the same way, if we understand the meaning of sound doctrine to be *healthy words*, we will understand why the first defense of those words must be seen in our

manner of life. No one will (nor, should they) take seriously our claim to know God if, by our *"deeds we deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless to any good deed"* (Titus 1:16).

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Sound Doctrine Defined

Titus, Chapter Two

t

he second chapter
of Paul's epistle to

Paul Jarrett

being "zealous for good
deeds."

Titus begins with Paul exhorting Titus to speak "the things which are fitting for **sound doctrine**." The chapter ends (v. 15) with Paul telling Titus that it is "these things" which he is to speak. It is safe to assume that what comes between these two verses constitutes Paul's definition of sound doctrine.

When you look at the kind of things Paul wrote about in Titus 2 it becomes apparent that His concept of sound doctrine went well beyond what is said and done in a church assembly for an hour or two one day a week. For him, it pertained to how one lives one's life twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Put succinctly, sound doctrine is about character and conduct.

For older men, it's about being "temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance." For older women sound doctrine is about learning "to be reverent in their behavior...teaching what is good." For younger women it's learning to "love their husbands and children...(being) sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored." And for younger men it involves being "an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech." For all of God's servants, sound doctrine is something we put on as we learn to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly." It is seen ultimately in our

A common mistake is to take a biblical term and then attach one's own definition to that term. There is no greater tendency of this than when some attach their own meaning to the phrase "sound doctrine," rather than preaching and teaching it as defined by Paul. When this happens the healthy words of Scripture are sometimes distorted in such a way as to justify the very kind of conduct which sound doctrine is meant to discourage. If we want to avoid this error, we need to insist on preaching and teaching sound doctrine as Paul defined it in our text.

Sound Doctrine Displayed: Titus, Chapter Three

W

here would you go to find a perfect example of sound doctrine? If your definition of sound doctrine is only about a message, you might look to the words or the writings of some man. If your definition of sound doctrine is about what is said and done in a church building, you might go looking to find a perfect church. However, if you appreciate the fact that sound doctrine is about how you live your life, you are going to go looking for an example of a healthy life. When you do that, there is really only one place. What do you think about when you think of the life of Christ?



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Peter described Jesus as one who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Paul summed up the message of Christ as being, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Paul saw the kindness of God as displayed in Christ as the means of changing us from a people "enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" to a people who are "ready for every good deed (who) malign no one (but are) peaceable, gentle, showing consideration for all men" (read Titus 3:1-5).

Sound doctrine is often associated with reproof and rebuke. No doubt this is due in large part to what Paul wrote to Timothy about those who would not endure sound doctrine and would need to be rebuked. While proclaiming sound doctrine will sometimes require that we "reprove, rebuke (and) exhort," we must not overlook the fact that this is to be done "with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

We must also be careful to be sure we are rebuking those who are indeed the ones needing to be rebuked. Jesus and those religious leaders who opposed Him rebuked each other. The scribes and the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for violating their traditions, while Jesus in turn rebuked them for placing their traditions ahead of the weightier matters desired by God (Matthew 15:1-20; 23:1-28).

We must be careful that our version of sound doctrine always reflects the healthy

words which the Lord taught and displayed in His life. That version is, perhaps, best summed up by something Paul mentions six times in the 46 verses which make up the book of Titus—*good deeds*.

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.....Three Marks of Servanthood

“Now that I, your Lord and

Peter Rode

slave or a servant in the ancient world was to have a

Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them,” (John 13:14-17).

That night in the upper room Jesus challenged His disciples to upon themselves the life of the towel—the life of servanthood. At the end of the challenge the Lord noted that (contrary to all the self-centered values of the world) it is in the life of servanthood that true happiness is found. In the pursuit of such a life there are three attitudes that characterize the heart of a genuine servant.

First, he/she will not demand recognition. A servant is willing to remain in the shadows, to be a team player for the benefit of the body and the glory of God instead of one's own ego. The servant gives without acknowledgment; in fact, he or she is willing to give so that no one knows who has done the giving. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 6:1, 3-4: “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven... When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Second, a true servant does not demand a reward. The servant gives without expecting anything in return from the person he or she has served. True servanthood does not manipulate and does not have a desire to control others.

The best thing that could happen to a

benevolent, compassionate, and generous master. In such a household he knew that all of his needs would be met and, therefore, he had a sense of security and safety. The servant was not merely the property of the lord or master, but was considered a valuable asset to be nurtured.

Our role as a bondservant of Jesus Christ is similar. He is our benevolent Lord and Master. He is the one from whom we take our daily orders and from whom we receive what we need. He is the one who has entrusted us to conduct spiritual business in His name. A genuine servant knows that in Christ he possesses all his needs, all that is truly important, all that is desirable and of value.

Third, a true servant does not demand self-rights. He or she yields first to God and then to others. While a servant will stand up for what is right in God's eyes, the one with the heart of a genuine servant does not insist that he have his own way. As Paul wrote, “Honor one another above yourselves,” (Romans 12:10), and, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” (Ephesians 5:21).

We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). It is out of that love that we serve. Service is the evidence of authentic love—it is love in action.

The challenge is for us to become more like Christ, which in turn means that we will take up the towel of the servant.

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. church. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Peter Jennings vs. Jesus.....

I did not watch the recent ABC

Jim Mullican

crown prince Belshazzar.

Later, another tablet turned

television special with news anchor Peter Jennings seeking to discredit the gospel accounts. Judging by the reports I heard from people whodid watch it and from the responses I saw on the local news the following evening, the program was a blatant attempt to deny everything the Bible says about Jesus.

In my studies in archaeology and ancient history, I have been repeatedly impressed by the fact that events recorded in the Bible

have often been corroborated by new discoveries in historical or archaeological research. Space allows me to mention only one example. Prior to 1915, liberal critics of the Bible had a field day over the book of Daniel's references to King Belshazzar as the last king of the Neo-Babylonian empire. They argued that all the historical records from that time showed Nabonidus as the king ruling when Cyrus the Great and his Medo-Persian army captured Babylon in late 539 BC. But in 1915 a tablet came to light which contained a prayer for the king, Nabonidus, and for his son, the Carolina Christian

: up which said Nabonidus had "entrusted the camp to his oldest son" while he went off on archaeological digs in Arabia. He alienated the powerful priests of Marduk by sending the idols he

unearthed back to Babylon to be worshiped alongside Marduk, and it's generally thought these priests may have assisted Cyrus in overthrowing Nabonidus as a result.

The fact that Belshazzar was still only serving as a regent for his father also explains why

: Belshazzar in Daniel 5:16 offers to make Daniel "the third highest ruler in the Kingdom." He himself was only second in authority.

: Peter Jennings and all the critics can say whatever they want, but on every point where the Bible can be tested, it has been proved accurate and reliable. Those who truly look at the evidence cannot doubt that the Bible is accurate. The evidence is overwhelming!

Jim Mullican preaches for the Channelview Church of Christ in Channelview, Texas, and is the former Associate Editor of Carolina Christian. He may be contacted at 1301 Sheldon Rd., Texas 77530.

**"THOSE WHO
TRULY LOOK AT
THE EVIDENCE
CANNOT DOUBT
THAT THE
BIBLE
IS ACCURATE."**

.....Reflections on Character

Ben Hamilton is a young man of character. As an All-American offensive lineman for the University of Minnesota's Golden Gophers, Hamilton once turned down a spot on *Playboy* magazine's preseason All-America team. The reason: he's a devout Christian and considers *Playboy* to be at odds with his religious values. He said, "I didn't want to portray the wrong idea of the kind of person I am."

Ben is heeding the warning of 1 Corinthians 15:33. "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" He should be commended for his commitment to purity of heart and life as a follower of Jesus. But there is something else interesting about his decision to stand for his convictions.

According to the Associated Press,

Johnny Melton

"Some NFL officials think Hamilton's decision may

actually benefit his draft status, in an era when personal behavior is an highly publicized issue." Scott Studwell, player coordinator for the Minnesota Vikings, explained, "From a character standpoint you don't have to worry about Ben Hamilton." He went on to state, "Character plays a major role in the evaluation process, so that's certainly a benefit as far as his pro potential is concerned."

Now that makes me wonder about something else. If character is now playing a major role in the evaluation process of professional athletes, why isn't it playing a major role in the political process as well?

Think about it.

Johnny Melton is a former editor of Carolina Christian and presently serves the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS.

NEW MEXICO...

The *Christian Chronicle* recently reported on the impact of recent wildfires in New Mexico. At least ten families or relatives of members of the churches of Christ in Los Alamos lost homes to the fire. In the southern part of the state, downed power lines started fires that destroyed thirteen homes owned by members of the church and ten buildings at a Bible Camp. Skyridge Youth

Camp was sponsored by the Sunset church of Christ in Carlsbad, NM. Skyridge is conducting their program this summer in a nearby school and plans to be operational by May 1, 2001. The Churches Of Christ Disaster Relief Effort has shipped \$400,000 in relief goods to New Mexico.

HOUSTON, TX...

Well-known preacher

and evangelist Jule Miller passed from this life on July 4. Miller developed the popular Visualized Bible Study Series (more commonly known as the "Jule Miller filmstrips"), which became a standard method of evangelism in churches of Christ. He is survived by his wife, Judy, and ten children.

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"How Do We Love?: Studies in 1 Corinthians 13"

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How Do You Love?.....

h

ow do I love thee? Too often,

Dennis Conner

not the way I'm called to love you. How many sermons have been preached, articles published and books written on the subject of love? Word for word, there is likely more material available about love than perhaps any biblical subject. Yet, for all the words, it is a struggle to practice and maintain an authentic love in our relationships in the body of Christ.

Paul exhorted the church in Colossae, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14). Love is the glue that holds us together. In another church with connections to Paul—Corinth—there wasn't much glue in

evidence. Corinth was a fractured church where relationships were in a mess. Paul's corrective for the relational problems there can be found in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians.

The contextual setting of chapter 13 is interesting. It appears in the middle of an extended section about spiritual gifts and worship abuses. It is no accident that the "love section" appears where it does. The misuse of the gifts and the abuses in worship (including, most notably, the

exclusion of some Christians from the communion gatherings) were indicative of the poor relationships in the Corinthian church. Paul did not tell the Corinthians to quit seeking the spiritual gifts, but told them in essence "above all these things put on love." Love, he would tell them, is, after all, the greatest of all spiritual gifts. Without it, everything else in the Christian experience (including the exercise of gifts and the possession of knowledge) is rendered meaningless.

But just what does it mean to love one another? Contrary to what many would seem to believe these days, there is much more to love than a perpetual case of the warm fuzzies. Loving others as God calls us to love them

"... There is much more to love than a perpetual case of the warm fuzzies."

is the hardest thing we will ever try to do. "Love one another" is a call to action. One would be absolutely foolish to deny the emotional aspect of Christian love (the church has suffered too long from that particular abuse), but we are also naive, at best, if we think of love only in terms of emotion. Most times, it's just plain hard work. It runs counter to our carnal tendencies. It calls upon us to do things we don't want to do and things that are not easy to do. It calls upon us to say "no"

to self and “yes” to the real needs of others, to be completely honest with both ourselves and others, to be patient when we would rather scream, to give when we would rather keep, to invest when we would rather be miserly, to be merciful when we would rather judge. Let there be no misunderstanding—loving the brethren is hard work.

Let there also be no misunderstanding regarding this additional truth—loving rightly is not just our work. Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians that love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is the result of His work in us, and it doesn’t happen magically. Nor does it happen without

our cooperation. We must be willing to allow the Spirit to have free course in our lives. Through conflict, encounter, circumstances and the unrelenting power of God’s truth the Holy Spirit transforms us into a loving family.

In this issue of *Carolina Christian* we explore Paul’s great love treatise of 1 Corinthians 13. Jesus said that love is to be the distinguishing mark of the believer. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul shows the church what that love should look like and how it should behave. May God be with us all as we strive to fulfill the high calling of love.

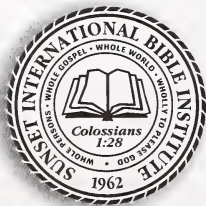


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The Church and Morality

The Other Perspective (7)

there is ample evidence that the human heart has ingrained within it the sense of what is right and wrong. Having the potential to know precisely what is right and wrong or having a vague sense of general categories of morality and immorality is not, however, sufficient. The "moral sense" within us needs to be cultivated and instructed. Essentially all we know from research and observation of human beings about who we are as humans is confirmed in the Bible. Paul's insights from the letter to the church in Rome are particularly instructive in this discussion of the innate nature of humans as moral beings. There were Gentiles who had a sense of morality even when—perhaps especially when—their culture was disintegrating around them due to the rampant

Ron Newberry

immorality evident in their society. It was not sufficient in itself to serve as a corrective.

However, they still had a sense of what was right and what was wrong.

On the other hand, there were the Jews who had the law. They had tried through sacrifices and meticulous observations of the law to remain morally upright. While they no doubt attained a higher standard of morality than those who just acted on their human instincts, they also fell short of the

**"To turn
away from
the worship
of God is to
turn to the
worship
of self."**

requirements. My point is both groups had a sense of morality as humans even though one relied more on the internal sense and the other on external. The external teaches us about the creator by looking at his creation. The internal instruction is more vague but nonetheless important because it brings to our consciousness the disturbing realization that we are moral beings and we are accountable. (cf. Romans 1-2).

Therefore, this moral sense we have been discussing for the past few months has two coordinates. One coordinate is God's self-disclosure found in the expression of his eternal power and deity called the creation. The revelation of God in creation is complete even though it is insufficient. So, this first coordinate bears witness to his exist-

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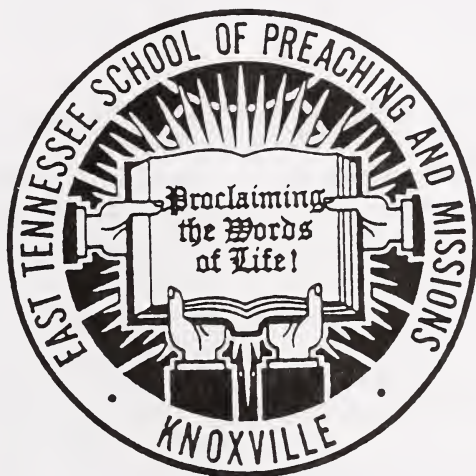
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ence. The second coordinate makes available knowledge of his moral character. It is what Wells calls in his book *Losing Our Virtue* the "fabric of moral life within" (p. 160). But it is not inherently adequate. We need the revelation of God in the written word to instruct our underdeveloped sense of morality.

From the created universe we humans have a sense of awe when we consider him who made it and us who observe his creation. Admittedly we strain to see through the twilight knowledge we have. But suffice to say we nonetheless have some sense of how we ought to behave before the living God. Lurking within the sinful nature, however, is the urge to dismiss all we know and disregard his directives. This civil war is clearly a contradiction within us but the contradiction leaves us, to use Paul's words in Romans 1:20, "without excuse."

The reality is that when people turn away from God—either his truth revealed through nature or his moral truth revealed in his word—he turns away from them. To dismiss what is right and good is to default to what is bad. When we move away from goodness, we automatically turn to what is evil. There is no middle ground. To turn away from the worship of God is to turn to the worship of self.

Paul notes twice in Romans 1:24, 26

that God "gave them up." He gave them up because they refused to acknowledge consciously what they had instinctively sensed and because they would not instruct their hearts to know God.

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Love of the Brethren

W

hen our Lord
called us to be

Dane Waggoner

His disciples, He exhibited the highest form of love ever displayed. He did not think of Himself, but of us. Regardless of how much it cost Him, Christ wanted the best for us.

As the children of the Lord, we also are called to possess this same kind of love. No matter what it may cost us, we are to seek the highest good for others. We are commanded to love our brothers in 1 John 2:10 and 3:11. If we do not love as Christ loved, then we are not of God. It's as simple as that. We cannot say, "Oh, how I love Jesus, oh, how I love God," and then not love the children of God (1 John 4:21). If we follow the Lord, we have no choice in the matter.

As a child of God, I am part of the body of Christ. And you are a part of that same body. I belong to you and you belong to Christ, and we should not intentionally harm a member of the body of Christ any more than we would intentionally cause harm to a part of our physical bodies. Imagine hitting your thumb with a hammer instead of the nail. Would you then stand and rebuke that stupid thumb for getting in the way? That would be ridiculous. Instead, immediately the mouth opens, the thumb goes in, the tongue gently comforts, and the salivary glands begin to cool and soothe. The brain sends signals to the rest of the body. The heart pumps blood to the injured thumb. The entire body sympathizes together. That one little member of the body set all that action into motion. When it was hurting, the whole body hurt with it.

This example illustrates how we in the

body of Christ should act
toward and with one

another. We are called to see to the needs of one another, our love springing into action to help when others are hurting. That kind of love will heal many of the divisive wounds in the body of Christ.

As we express our love for the brethren, it must be extended to all, seeking only their highest good. The truth is, we should not expect heaven as our reward if we harbor hatred or ill-will toward a brother or sister. But you may protest, "That guy is just not lovable." Well, perhaps that is how Christ sees us. None of us can lay claim to His love because of our worthiness, yet He has given it to us. "We love Him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Yes, we all have our faults and weaknesses. Yes, at times we are all unlovable, but we must love each other in spite of ourselves. Our goal must always be to seek each other's well-being. I love you as a brother and sister. I may not approve of some of the things you do, but I still love you. Because of that love, I rebuke and chasten that you, too, might not lose heaven as your goal.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, as Paul wrote to a church that was suffering because of too little love, we are called to actively love as Christ has loved. Read it again so that you might see how love must behave.

Let us encourage one another in love that we might all remain in Christ until that great judgment day!

Dane Waggoner preaches for the Duncan Church of Christ in Duncan, SC. He can be contacted at 1099 S. Danzler Rd., Duncan, SC 29334.

The Necessity of Love

““

Uf I speak in the
tongues of men and

Stephen J. Walls-Mathis

and community.

of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing”
(1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NIV)

Do you remember reading these words for the first time? There’s no holding back here, no middle ground. You have love or you have nothing at all. Imagine being one of the original recipients, hearing Paul’s words—the Lord’s word—spoken to your congregation. What’s behind these words? What is Paul responding to in Corinth? Pride. Competition. Showmanship. Self-centeredness. A “what’s in it for me” approach to faith.

Of course, the church hasn’t changed much in 2000 years. I find myself making comparisons at church. We end up doing the right things for the wrong reasons. Rather than further the work of the Lord, it tears down His body of believers. Programs take precedent over people. Being right is valued more highly than caring for each other. We get caught up in presentation at the expense of relationship
Carolina Christian

“THE WORLD
HAS MORE
THAN ENOUGH
RESONDING
GONGS AND
CLANGING
CYMBALS.”

Paul could see it

happening in Corinth, just as you and I can see it today. It gets us nowhere. What would happen if we were to focus on loving one another before we tried to get anything done? What would happen in our congregations if we were to spend our time and energy nurturing relationships, developing the habit of listening to each other, becoming places where people were cared for and supported? Before we add another program or develop some new idea, let’s follow a more excellent way. Our

churches need love, our society need loves—committed, in action, God inspired love. That’s what we lack; that’s what we have to pursue.

Society hasn’t changed much either. (“...there is nothing new under the sun,” Ecclesiastes 1:9, NIV) The world we live in, too often mirrored in our churches, values resounding gongs and clanging cymbals. We try so hard to compete, to beat the world at its own game. “Pro choice? Well then, meet pro life! New Morality? We can answer with the Moral Majority.” But by focusing our time and energy on external statements, practices or policies we overlook or ignore internal grace and truth. Restoring the principle of love above all else is the only way we

are going to make a lasting impact in our world.

Consider abortion as an example. Many devoted Christians have poured their lives into fighting against the practice. The goal has been to protect and nurture God-given life. The strategy has been to use angry protest, civil action and legislative means. But while the goal is honorable, we've gotten off track by playing by the world's rules. We're trying to prove that our position is right, rather than putting the love of God into action.

Instead of trying to prove how wrong the world is, why not heed Paul's advice and live out our call to love above all else. Instead of trying to use the courts or the legal system to combat abortion, why not

love the women with unwanted pregnancies, offer them compassion and understanding, adopt the unwanted children, work to correct the cycles of abuse and poverty that cling to so many?

The world has more than enough resounding gongs and clanging cymbals. God expects something different from His people. He holds out the necessity, the absolute necessity of love. What would happen if we sought, first and foremost, to restore the kind of love God has in mind, the kind of love Jesus lived? Without that, we gain nothing.

Stephen can be contacted at 355 Carpenters Mill Rd., Ruckersville, VA 22968.

THOMASVILLE, NC...

The Trindale church of Christ has a new temporary location while searching for a permanent site. They are currently meeting at the Thomasville Primary School at 915 Sunrise Avenue. Sunday Bible classes are at 9:30 am, worship services at 10:30 am and 6 pm. On Wednesdays they meet in small groups in different home. Three have recently been baptized and attendance continues to grow. For information write PO Box 14252, Archdale, NC 27263 or

call Rob Albright at 336-472-0335.

AIKEN, SC...

Sherman Offord is the new preacher for the Hampton Avenue church of Christ in Aiken. Offord is a graduate of the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies and move to Aiken from Sumter, South Carolina, in August. His wife Yvonne is a school teacher.

GREENSBORO, NC...

The drama "At the Right Time" will be presented at the Friendly Avenue church of Christ in Greensboro at 7:30 PM

on November 16, 17 & 18. There will also be a 2 PM matinee on the 18th. Maria Smith, writer and director of this drama, is also a member of the Friendly Avenue congregation. For more information contact the church office at 336-292-7649 or visit them online at www.Friendly-Ave.org.

ROCK HILL, SC...

Wallace Beasley has accepted the preaching position with the Lesslie Avenue Church of Christ in Rock Hill. His wife's name is Betty.

Love Is.

On the basis of its depth and imagery

alone, 1 Corinthians 13 stands as one of the greatest statements ever recorded dealing with the subject of love.

However, these words from the apostle Paul were not meant to be admired simply for their own artistic or literary sake. Rather, they come right in the middle of a discussion of some very serious problems among the members of the Corinthians church. The church was in danger of dividing over a variety of issues, and in particular the presence of spiritual gifts as possessed by different members and the spiritual arrogance of many of the gift possessors. Rather than praying that those spiritual gifts would be removed,

Geoffrey Sikes

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to desire the best

gifts. And then he added the statement, "And yet I show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31).

**"Love will
be present in
the throne
room
of heaven
itself."**

That more excellent way was the pursuit of love. In the first three verses of chapter thirteen, Paul said that all the good he could do was of no personal profit without love as motivation. Put into positive terms, he was saying that love is necessary to please God. All the good works that we perform should spring from a heart of love. In all that we do,

we must never forget that God looks at the heart.

Once Paul established his premise, he then went on to lay out various characteristics of love. In verses four through six, not only did he tell the Corinthians what love was not, but he also told them what love is. Love is longsuffering and kind, and it rejoices in the truth. Love is not dependent upon outward circumstances or upon the acceptable behavior of another. Otherwise, there would be no need to be longsuffering. And when love needs to respond, it is done in kindness, seeking the best for the other person involved. Such kindness might at times involve short term pain, but love causes us to take a long term look. As the Hebrew writer reminds us, "Now no chastening

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seems to be joyous for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

At the heart of Paul's discussion is verse seven. Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." All four of these characteristics fall under the umbrella of constancy. No matter what is going on around love, love bears up and endures; it hangs on to hope; it holds to belief. Concerning the idea of believing all things, David Lipscomb wrote, "It believes all the good which it can of anyone as long as it is possible to do so without betraying the truth of God." True to the definition of agape love, love always seeks the highest good of others.

And as Paul brought his discourse to a close, he emphasized the lasting nature of love. Verse eight begins with the words, "Love never fails." While prophecies, tongues, and knowledge were going to vanish away, love would remain and it

would remain even after the twin pillars of faith and hope were no more. A common element of faith and hope is both revolve around the unseen. Hebrews reminds us further that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). And the apostle Paul told the Romans that "hope that is seen is not hope" (Romans 8:25). As long as this world abides, we will have faith and hope. But once this world is no more, faith will be lost in sight, and we will come face to face with the object of our hope. When that day comes, there is one thing that will surely remain, and that is love. That is why the next words following this great chapter are "pursue love" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Love is many things. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, love is a necessary thing if we are going to be pleasing to God. He also told them that love is a constant thing, holding fast through whatever might come one's way. Love will be present in the throne room of heaven itself, and if we want to stand there as well, we need to be a people who pursue love and who demonstrate its characteristics as we interact with our spiritual brothers and sisters and with those whom we would seek to bring into the loving family of God.

Geoffrey Sikes, a native of North Carolina and longtime worker at Carolina Bible Camp, currently preaches for the Madison Street Church of Christ in Clarksville, Tennessee.

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Love Is Not...

“Love...is not jealous;
love does not brag

Dennis Conner

anger toward God because He
didn't give me what you have.

and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness..." (1 Corinthians 13:4-6a; NASB). Paul's discussion of love in this section of his letter to the Corinthian church demonstrates a perfect contrast; that is, he addresses both sides of the nature of genuine love, telling the Corinthians both what it is and what it is not. On both counts, however, love is active. It is actively positive and actively negative. There are ways it does behave and ways it does not behave. But the contrasts serve to provide his readers with a complete picture of the love that should characterize the body of Christ.

Authentic love is not *jealous*, or *envious*. The root idea behind this word is "passionate longing." Now, there is nothing inherently wrong about a passionate longing for something. After all, it was the psalmist who said that "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you." The problem arises when we long for the wrong thing, or for the wrong reason.

In Corinth it appears that people were being envied because of their possession of one of the spiritual gifts. Today, fellow believers may be envied for a number of reasons: the attention and recognition one receives, the gifts or personality one possesses, and so on. And when you envy someone, you are seldom going to seek that which is in the best interest of the other person.

Envy in reality expresses an underlying Carolina Christian

And it makes me miserable.

The antidote to envy is to remember that it is God who has made us what we are and has given us what we have. This is our uniqueness and we must not only recognize it, but accept and embrace it. When we remember that it is God who has provided us with what we have (whether gifts or anything else) then we have no reason for the insecurity of envy.

Love is not *boastful* or *arrogant*. God's endowments also remove any basis for boasting. True love will be more impressed with its own *unworthiness*. I suspect that while the various gifted factions in Corinth were trying to impress one another with the arrogant display of their gifts, there were a few quiet, humble people who were content with the fact that they were loved by an awesome God. As William Barclay put it, "The real lover cannot ever get over the wonder that he is loved."

Neither is love *rude* (it does not act *unbecomingly*). It is no accident that in Paul's thinking rudeness follows arrogance in his discussion of what love is not. When pride puffs up the heart, rudeness seems to naturally follow. It is a strange anomaly that Christians sometimes take delight in being blunt—almost brutal—in their dealings with others. Perhaps you have in your acquaintance that person who crows, "I just say what I think, and if it hurts someone's feelings I can't help that. People will have to accept that." In other words, rude.

Love can be frank and honest without being rude. This may seem a trivial thing in comparison with some of the other matters

discussed in this section, but do not many conflicts between us arise not from some obvious and blatant offense, but simply from inconsiderate actions and the hurt feelings that result? Rudeness creates an atmosphere that is ripe for conflict.

Further, love is not *selfish*. Congregations are filled with people who think only of their rights, their privileges, their needs; only of what others can and should do for them. Authentic love, on the other hand, is focused outward, not inward. It serves. It looks first to the needs of others.

It is inevitable that as we live in relationship with others in the body of Christ, conflicts and misunderstandings will arise. When that happens, genuine love is not easily *provoked*. That is, it does not fly into a temper; it is not irritable. A loving person keeps his cool under pressure. I knew of a preacher who once had been threatened with physical harm by an elder in the presence of other elders. On another occasion there was an incident in which an elder and a member of the congregation got into a scuffle in the foyer of the church building. Another time in yet another congregation, feelings in a congregational meeting were running hot and a church member, in a fit of temper, threatened one of the church leaders. Quite a contrast to the spirit of Christ, wouldn't you say? There is simply no place for tantrums in our relationships with one another, nor in our assemblies.

It is also the nature of genuine love that it *keeps no account of wrong-doing* (or, *thinks no evil*). William Barclay tells the story of a village in Polynesia where the natives used to spend much of their time in fighting and

feasting. It was the custom among these people for each man to keep some reminder of hatred. Articles were hung from the roofs of their huts to keep alive the memory of wrongs done to them. Well, church folk today are simply not that primitive. No, we prefer to keep a mental ledger of such wrongs; that way, it's not so obvious.

A loving person does not dwell on the hurtful things done to him or her in the past. It's the natural thing for us to want to keep a personal hurt file, but that only deepens the wounds of bitterness, which soon becomes a cancer of the soul. Love forgives and lets go of the past. Love is wonderfully forgetful!

Finally, love *does not rejoice in unrighteousness* (or, *wrong-doing*). How do you feel when you hear about the failings or sin of another Christian? Does it break your heart? Do you feel compelled to reach out to that person, offering whatever help you can? Or do you find that too often there is a sense of delight or smugness in your heart? "Well, I'm not at all surprised" "I knew that it was just a matter of time before he did something like that!" Too often the faults of our brethren becomes an occasion to congratulate ourselves for our own righteousness.

True love will instead find no pleasure in the strugglings and failings of others and will rejoice in every step of progress made by forgiven sinners who are moving in the direction of Jesus. Love focuses on praise rather than faults; commendation rather than condemnation.

So, how's your love life?

The Family Page

The Worthy Man

My husband
and I have

Rita Watson

raised two daughters, who now have their own homes. Raising daughters, I understand. After all, I am one. We raised our daughters praying that they would become the virtuous women of Proverbs 31. Of course, the final tally won't be in until their husbands and children rise up and call them blessed.

We are still raising a son. He's thirteen now and we would like him to grow up and marry a virtuous woman. But what kind of man attracts a virtuous woman? The answer is found, of all places, in Proverbs 31!

These are the words of King Lemuel's mother. Being a good mother she knows that if you want to get a point across to your son, you must let him think it was all his idea! So, in verse 10 she asks, "Who is he who can find a virtuous woman?" and in the process of describing the virtuous woman she tells of the worthy man.

First, she says, "The heart of her husband trusts..." (verse 11). The man worthy of the virtuous woman has the ability to trust. He is not one who must control every situation or who must know absolutely everything that is going on. He can delegate and leave it to others to accomplish their tasks.

It is so difficult for parents to give a job to a child and then let him or her do it. We want to scrutinize and correct every move, and sometimes we pass too critical a judgment on the final out-
Carolina Christian

come. To train our sons to be able to trust others (especially

their wives), we must let them do some things all on their own and look for ways to praise the outcome. Husbands and fathers must demonstrate trust in all their family relationships.

Then, "Her husband is known in the gates, where he sits among the elders of the land," (verse 23). In other words, the worthy man is a spiritual man; a man of wisdom and sound judgment. Building godly wisdom is something that starts early in life and is a daily process. Our sons must be in the Word daily. We simply cannot expect a thirty minute Sunday school class and 45 minutes in the middle of the week to establish our sons in godly wisdom. We must be teaching them daily the will of God.

Finally, "Her husband boasts and praises her..." This man is not afraid to compliment his wife in front of others. His own ego does not demand that he put her down or ignore her attributes.

Let's begin now shaping a habit of appreciation in our sons. Parents must let their sons see and hear how much they appreciate one another. Sons need to hear their parents praising their mates to others. And parents should praise their boys as well. It inspires us all to do more and do better when we know we are appreciated.

Want a virtuous daughter-in-law?
Then raise a son worthy of her.

Rita Watson can be contacted at 2163 Oak Grove Rd., Red Boiling Springs, TN 37150.

Half-Empty or Half-Full?

h

ave you ever
been asked that

David Kneip

question before? Someone holds up a glass containing 50% water and 50% air and asks you if the glass is half-empty or half-full. What do you say? Of course, it's really both, but the question is just a simple test to tell you whether you're generally an optimist or a pessimist.

But what if I told you that I could give you a glass that's both 100% full AND 100% empty? No kidding. Completely full and completely empty all of the time. Don't believe me?

All right. Imagine you have in your hand a glass of water. Now imagine yourself pouring out your glass onto the ground. Out here in Texas, that might mean you're trying to grow some grass, but in the Carolinas, hurricanes take care of that for you. So there you are, with an empty glass, right? WRONG! You look down, and your glass is totally full again. Hmmm... So you empty it again. And it's full again. In fact, the harder you work to empty your glass, the more quickly you realize how full it is. What in the world is going on?

That glass of water is your life. What is your life full of? You might think of things – car, clothes, friends. What about events – band, football, wrestling, church. Maybe you've considered spiritual things – pride, seeking God, self-centeredness – both good and bad. So what does the emptying thing have to do with all of that, you might ask? Good question. The answer starts with Jesus and then moves to us.

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing (or *emptied himself*), taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8)

Jesus' life was full of a lot of things – healings, teaching, sawdust, sore feet, drunks, prostitutes, Pharisees, disciples, prayer, worship. But before all of them, his life was full of God's glory. He was God, and was with his Father all the time! But, for our sakes, he emptied that part of his life out to come to earth. And while on earth, he emptied

himself for us in death. But that's not the end of his story...

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11)

Jesus emptied his life for us, but God filled it back up in many ways. The loyal friends who surrounded him. The times of prayer when he communed with his Father once again. Opportunities to serve other people. Meals shared with almost every kind of person you can name. After his death, God filled him in even more amazing ways, giving him the ultimate place of authority over the entire universe.

So what does this mean for us? How do we empty our glass the way Jesus did? The answer's in the Bible, friends, and it's right before this section about Jesus. In fact, Paul talks about Jesus as the object lesson to help the Philippians understand what he's saying.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:3-5)

Do you brag a lot? Are you self-centered? Proud? Envious? Hateful? Over-competitive? A gossip? Exclusive? Empty yourself! Those things are all self-serving, and they get in the way of God's work in you and in others. Empty them! Ask God to help your attitude be the same as that of Christ Jesus, and work every day on looking more for the other guy's interests than your own.

Whether you're a pro at this emptying business or just beginning, let me make you a promise: God loves to fill cups (Psalm 23:5). As you empty yourself for him, you will notice more and more how God fills you up, in the same ways he did Jesus. You'll notice godliness in the people around you. You'll have opportunities to serve. You'll be more motivated to pray. I want you to take those things and run with them. Empty your glass with abandon, and rejoice in God's perpetual re-filling.

Remember: your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 100% empty, and 100% full.

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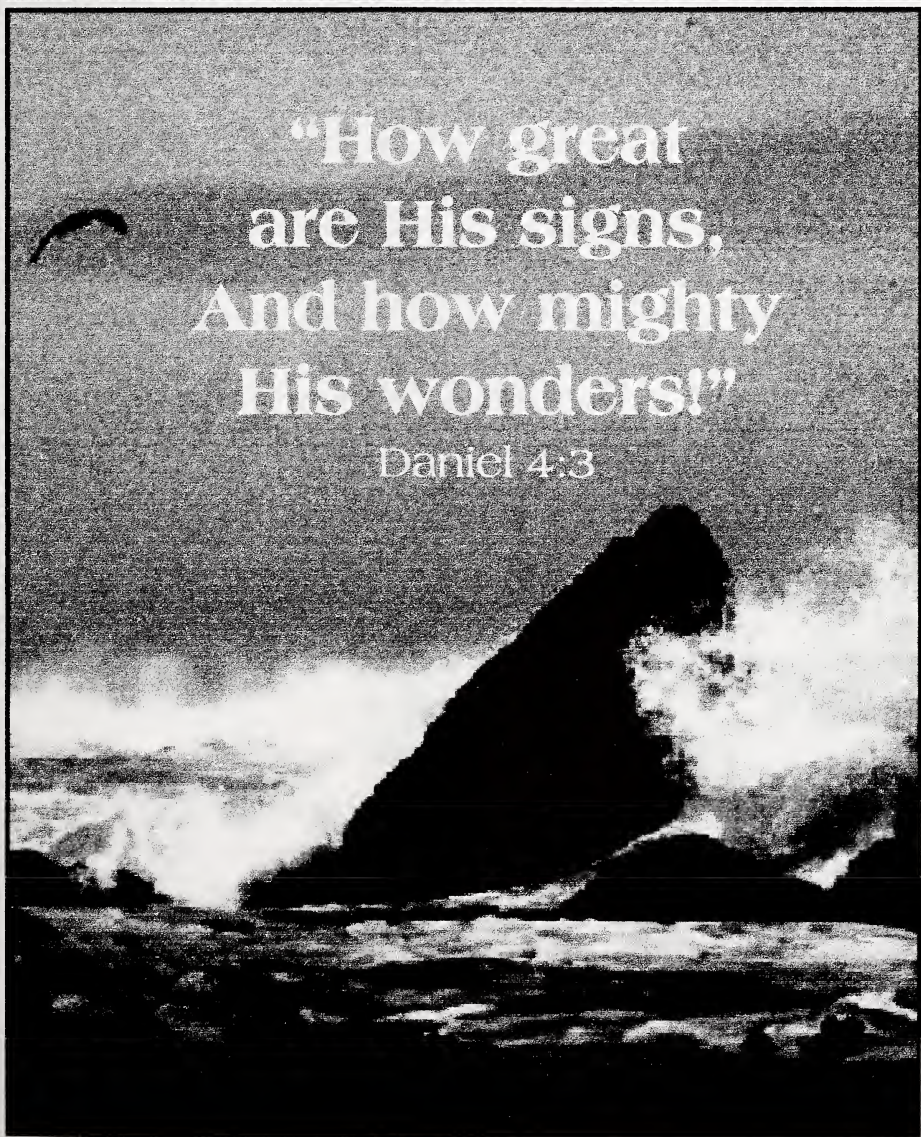
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"How great
are His signs,
And how mighty
His wonders!"

Daniel 4:3



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"But If Not" Moments.....

It's one of those texts that we still tend to

Dennis Conner

relegate to the file cabinet in our minds labeled "Children's Stories." It's the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace because they would not bow down to

Nebuchadnezzar's great idol (Daniel 3:8-25)! And it's far more than a nice little Bible school story, more than a myth or a legend. In this story we find the stuff of real faith—not merely faith under fire, but faith *in* the fire. In the midst of the fiery trials of life we must stand, and we are

assured that there is One who stands with us (see verse 25). These three brave young men were uncompromising in the face of danger and death. They were willing to be "faithful unto death" as evidence of their loyalty to their God, their faith being undergirded by the strong conviction that their God could and would deliver them! But in their story there is another aspect to faith that is easily missed, and that is the willingness to be true to God even in the face of unrealized expectations.

Standing before they king they unflinchingly declare, "...Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king." *He will deliver us.* Now that's the stuff of faith. Conviction!

: Almighty God! If God be for us, who can
: be against us! No spirit of compromise

Certainty! Trust in the delivering power of with the world in their faith. They could have reasoned within themselves, "We will fall down before the idol, but we won't actually worship." But no, they stood firm in their resolve. We rightly admire such faith and would do well to emulate it.

To be sure, there are many pressures in our own life situations and our culture that would compel us to compromise and take the path of least

resistance. We are tempted to do it everyday, but the temptation to bow down to the idols of our culture must be resisted. Yes, the boys have taught us a valuable lesson about faith. But they're not finished. What is perhaps an even more significant aspect of faith follows in verse 18.

There we find this fascinating statement: "But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve you gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." *But if not.* Those three words intrigue and humble me. They represent the language of unrealized expectations, and in the face of those it is often difficult for faith to thrive. It is in those "but if not" moments in life that

*"It is in those
'but if not'
moments in
life that faith
is truly tested
and it's mettle
determined."*

faith is truly tested and it's mettle determined. As someone put it in a sermon I read recently, "We want our prayers answered—but if not! We want long life and good health—but if not! We want to see miracles happen—but if not! If God says no to your cherished dreams and your fondest hopes, will you still trust Him? If God says no to your plans for the future, will you still serve Him? If God says no when through your tears you pray for those you love, will you still follow Him?"

Many times when people pray expectantly to God, and then fail to receive the expected answer, others often

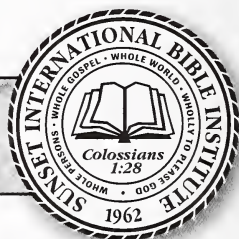
respond critically with, "Well, he didn't have enough faith." I beg to differ. It can require even greater faith to meaningfully pray, "But if not..." God is not subject to the whim of our expectations. He is under no obligation to answer as we would expect Him to answer. And when God answers as He means to answer, confounding our expectations, and one continues to believe, to love, to follow, and to serve—well, *that* is faith.

Our three lads were willing to trust God even if His answer meant their deaths. Fortunately, God did deliver them miraculously and powerfully. *But had He not...*

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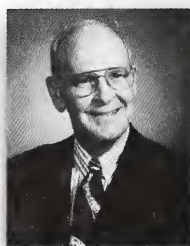
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The Church and Morality

Honor and shame (8)

It is becoming more evident each day that the values rooted in the ancient world of the Bible are getting a second look these days. Among the most important ancient values are honor and shame. These values and their connection deserve some space in this series of articles based on the book *Losing Our Virtue* by David Wells.

Unlike the ancient world our world is a highly individualized culture. What we buy, what we wear, how we look are all expression of our inner private reality. The ancient world fostered a sense of belonging rather than isolated individualism. Individuals were understood in conjunction with their social matrix. People were thought of first in terms of the family or clan as evident from the myriad of

Ron Newberry

"One soon realizes that he turned the ancient world and its paradigms upside down."

references to Jesus, the son of Joseph, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, David, the son of Jesse, Simon, the son of John, etc. The premise seems to have been that to know the family was to know something about the son.

People were also known in reference to their place of birth. Remember he was Jesus of Nazareth, Saul of Tarsus, Joseph of Arimathea, etc. Some places were more honorable than others. People were also understood in terms of their ethnic origin.

Cretans, for example, were known to be liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons (Tit. 1:12). They were understood in terms of their occupation. Jesus was a carpenter's son (Matt. 13:55). Finally, people were understood in terms of any group to which they might belong. There were Herodians, Pharisees, Sadducees, as well as silver smith guilds, tent makers, etc.

The point is the ancient world was no place for a rugged individualist. Standing on one's own two feet was not a virtue. Groups were the source of identity and honor. In turn, one did not dishonor the group(s) to which he or she belonged. Honor was worth more than money.

In our modern culture, any sense of responsibility to the groups to which we belong has all but vanished. A teacher

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who is arrested for sexual misconduct with a student no doubt fears prosecution but has little concern for the impact it will have on the reputation of the school. A kidnapper may fear the police but he has little if any thought to the impact it will have on the community. A man who embezzles from his business may fear going to prison but he has little concern for the stigma that it might attach to his family. We seem more concerned about how our behavior is being perceived by others than we are about what it actually says about us as a person. We can readily see the differences in our culture and that of the ancient New Testament world.

However, the New Testament also disconnected itself from that ancient world's mindset. One does not have to think either long or hard to note the differences in the world's point of view and the kingdom of God, which Jesus spoke about and the "age to come," which he promised. One soon realizes that he turned the ancient world and its paradigms upside down. For example, Jesus said that the lowly ones were honored by God. The least were the greatest. Servanthood was to be preferred over ruling. On and on the list grows.

The reason behind this disconnect between the New Testament and the ancient world's norms is simple. The New Testament, while recording accurate historical data, is more than a vault for

storing cultural habits to be duplicated. It is a theological document, which super-sedes cultural values. It has a great deal to do with the training of the conscience, which we will explore next time.

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Gossip and Slander

there is something about fallen human nature that seems to make us love to hear something that another person has done wrong, and makes us even more anxious to tell others about that wrongdoing. If the wrongdoing is a fact, we are guilty of the sin of gossip. And if we are only repeating a rumor which is not in fact the truth, we are guilty of the sin of slander. Either way, we are guilty of sin. In 2 Corinthians 12:20, Paul lists these two among the sins he fears he will have to confront on his third visit to the city of Corinth. He says, "I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder."

Even so, there is something in us which loves to listen to gossip and slander. Proverbs 18:8 observes that "the words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts." Interestingly, the Greek word usually rendered "the devil" in our English Bibles means "the slanderer" in secular Greek. In fact, it's the origin of the Spanish word, *diablo*, meaning "the devil." The devil himself is characterized by slander, as we see in the book of Job when he constantly criticizes and slanders Job. If he can get God's people to criticize and slander one another, he is as happy as can be because he knows that Proverbs 10:18 says, "Whoever spreads slander is a fool." The devil knows that slander and criticism promote strife and disunity in the church of God, contrary to the will of God.

Jim Mullican

You're probably familiar with the three-point test by

which we should clear everything that passes our lips, but it never hurts to be reminded, lest we forget. Here it is again.

1. First, we should ask, "Is it true?" If it isn't, we shouldn't be saying it, because liars will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur (Revelation 21:8). Even if we have confidence in the one who told us, we need to be absolutely positive that something is true before we repeat it in a way that will harm someone else's reputation.

2. Second, we should ask, "Is it needful?" Many things that are true don't need to be said. They won't strengthen anyone's faith nor encourage anyone to be a better Christian. In fact, repeating them will not accomplish anything good.

3. The final test for our words should be, "Is it kind?" Many things may be true. We may even feel that they need to be said. Still, they may not be kind. If our words cannot clear all three hurdles, they are probably better left unsaid.

Remember what James said, "If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect (i.e., mature) man, able to keep his whole body in check" (James 3:2). If we can learn to control our tongues, we've accomplished a large part of what we need to learn as we strive for Christian maturity.

Jim Mullican served as Associate Editor of Carolina Christian from 1992-1997. He presently serves the Channelview Church of Christ as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at 1301 Sheldon Rd., Channelview, TX 77530.

Worship Matters

i

ve been "going to worship" for

over sixty years, having missed very few opportunities to assemble on the Lord's Day. Others can lay claim to having been at it much longer.

Needless to say, it is an important part of my personal life. Recently, however, I've grown concerned about the way we "go at" worship these days. Please allow me to share a few of my concerns. See if you share them as well.

I'm concerned that we have developed a human standard for the order, times and arrangements we employ for worship. We know God desires his people to gather on the Lord's Day to "break bread." But, do we have such a rigid practice—such a formalized routine—that we actually think worship is only acceptable when we follow our own prescribed and preferred patterns? We might not even recognize NT worship if we could compare ours to the assemblies of our first century brethren (Acts 20:7).

I'm concerned that some think that only songs written over fifty years ago are truly spiritual. The truth is, many of those oldies aren't all that spiritual. Styles change, whether we like it or not. Metaphors that spoke to an agrarian culture no longer say much to moderns
Carolina Christian

Jerry Senn

**"THE WAY WE
APPROACH
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SPEAKS
VOLUMES ABOUT
THE INTENSITY
OF OUR
RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD."**

like ourselves. We all have our preferences. I do. But,

God never dictated styles. That's why Christ can be acceptably worshiped universally—in any culture and age. Are

we willing to respect other worship styles? Love demands that we do so. Acceptance of such differences is demanded (Eph 4:2).

I'm concerned that some of us may think that because we assemble, as commanded, we automatically worship, as commanded. Assemblies do not worship, people do. It is an individual

activity, performed corporately, but it must be very personal. Meaningless forms develop when we stop paying attention to what is going on inside our heart of hearts. Worship lifts us beyond ourselves, transcending mere thoughts. It is an action of the whole heart, not a mere formal act.

I'm concerned also that brethren often seem to feel no obligation to others when we're together for worship. It is as though we're a group of individuals who are present to go through a routine in search of a spiritual blessing for ourselves, with no thought of giving of ourselves. The living "body" is always concerned about each member's needs. Worship assemblies only please the

Father when the body as a whole is edified. Read 1 Corinthians 14.

I'm concerned that guests are often neglected and go away with unmet needs—seeking Christ and not finding him among us. Remember this: assemblies are not evangelistic, people are. A warm smile will go a long way—at least it is a beginning. A cordial word of thanks and an offer of help can transform a dead, lifeless hour into a real worshipful experience for those who visit.

I'm concerned when we are literally petrified to show any outward expressions of emotion in our worship assemblies. It is almost as if some feel it is more spiritual to carry a frown than a pleasant smile. We may laugh at a joke or story, but often resist showing adoration and praise, nor do we allow ourselves to show support for divine truth. How sad, and how wrong this is. "Decent and in order" doesn't mean "without emotion." In fact, it is "indecent" and "out of order" to express powerful, worshipful words without powerful and worshipful feelings. Real Jesus followers cannot remain unmoved by his love.

I'm concerned that few of us know and experience enough personal, private times of worship on a daily basis. Christ is an abiding presence, whether we acknowledge him or not. How sad to have him with us and never communicate or commune with our wonderful Savior. How ungrateful. How disgrace-

ful. How prideful. I'm convinced that the best way to improve our corporate worship is to fill our assemblies with daily worshipers. Once a week worship will remain stale and boring.

I'm concerned that God will look down at our worship assemblies and shake his head in disappointment as he reads the thoughts and intents of our hearts. The forms and specific acts may meet his external demands, while our hearts may be a thousand miles from him.

The word "worship" means "worthship." We show in worship how much we value God. Think about that! If we spoke words of praise to humans with the same lack of enthusiasm we sometimes use to speak to our heavenly Father, they would be insulted. Don't you think he is also? The way we approach worship speaks volumes about the intensity of our relationship with God. Christianity isn't a religion, it is a relationship.

I want to learn to worship my Father in a more effective way, both privately and publicly. Will you join me in this great adventure? We have rightly rejected human creeds and liturgies. Let us take care that we do not establish our own human yet unwritten forms which drain the spirit and enthusiasm from our assemblies. Amen!

Jerry Senn is Managing Editor of Carolina Christian and serves the Hendersonville church as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

An Anniversary.....

On September 18,
thirty years ago, I

Mark Hudson

nine Bible Camps, thirty-six
funerals, and twenty-five weddings.

was baptized into Christ. I was thirteen.

We worshiped in Laurel, Delaware. The folks had invited Roger Harkness over for dinner. He was the visiting speaker for a week long revival. While the dishes were being cleared, my brother and I sat with the preacher in the den. After a brief period of obligatory small talk, Roger asked, "You boys know what you need to do?" We did. "So, why haven't you?" Enough said.

We were baptized by Wallace Beasley before the preaching that night. I can remember sitting through the service with wet hair. I can remember singing the invitation song without guilt. I can remember charging off to school the next day with a sense of mission and purpose.

That was thirty years ago. I was thirteen.

These thirty years have brought no regrets or second thoughts about following Christ. I have, however, started to comprehend how clueless I was about life when I was thirteen.

- At thirteen...I never guessed my "hometown" would be Waynesboro, Virginia. That's even more strange when I consider that I never spent more than twelve consecutive months in the Shenandoah Valley.
- At thirteen...I never imagined that I would live six years in Ohio.
- At thirteen...I never knew that South Carolina would be home.
- At thirteen...I never thought I would spend the first twenty years of my adult life learning to preach and to minister. That journey has carried me to over a dozen countries on three continents, Carolina Christian

- At thirteen...I never understood the beauty of God or the ugliness of Satan.
- At thirteen...I never grasped the commitment my parents made to provide a Godly and stable home.
- At thirteen...I never realized being the parent of a teenager could be more challenging than being a teenager.
- At thirteen...I never knew just how proud a parent could be.
- At thirteen...I never experienced a full measure of joy, sorrow, temptation, victory, peace, or contentment.
- At thirteen...I never knew earnest prayer, serious study, or spiritual warfare.
- At thirteen...I never considered I knew more of "law" than grace.
- At thirteen...I never contemplated that God would use so many people to shape and mold my life.
- At thirteen...I never considered that boiled okra and Rapa Brand Scrapple would still be good eating after thirty years.
- At thirteen...I never had a clue about the course of this journey called life.

If the Lord sees fit to allow me and the world another thirty years, I may compose a few lines about "at forty-three I never..."

There are a few things about which I am certain. We serve a wonderful, powerful, and gracious God. In years past I was tempted to congratulate myself for perceived accomplishments. No more. I realize now that all that I have, all that I am, all that I do comes from God. I have been blessed with the greatest family on earth and many wonderful friends. I thank you, Father.

Mark Hudson preaches for the Whiskey Rd. Church in Aiken, SC. He can be contacted at 2006 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803.

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Parents are Weird.....

Parents are pretty weird, aren't they? I don't know about your parents, but mine always wanted me to do unbelievably crazy things—like take out the garbage every once in a while or clean up my room. Or maybe they harp on you for school stuff—“do your homework, ‘cause you won't be able to get into college with bad grades.” Parents get up in arms about all kinds of stuff, don't they?

You know, we as younger people have things pretty good in some senses. Things have changed quite a bit in the last hundred years concerning parents' relationships with their children. Used to, parents who could afford to do so decided everything for their children: who they would marry, what job they would have (for the boys), and who they would associate with. If you were from a poorer family, you worked all the time, probably where your parents worked, and so you didn't have much time to think about it. Now, though, our society is built on an individual's right to choose things for him- or herself. You have all kinds of freedom in your lives, and the challenge is to use them wisely and in a godly manner.

Unfortunately, when you're a teenager, you're stuck at the wonderful and frustrating time that's right between being a little kid and being a grown-up. You still depend on your parents for lots of things, but you're becoming more independent every day. That growing independence is fun and scary, and hopefully your parents desire that maturity for you (if you'd like

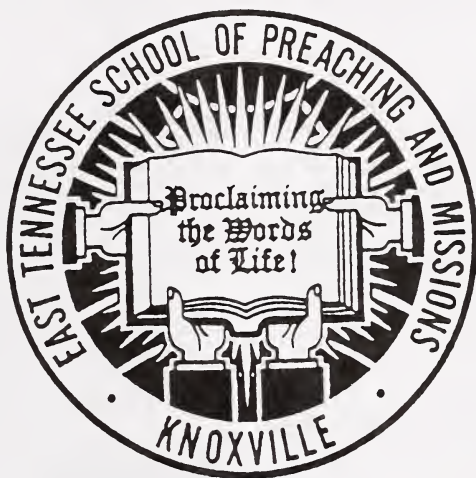
David Kneip

a great illustration of how God is that way, too, go read the first few verses of Hosea 11!).

Despite your growing independence, though, your parents make you do stuff you don't want to do, right? They inhibit your independence sometimes—what we were saying about housework or schoolwork. But do your parents ever make you do church stuff you don't want to do? Go to class, go to worship, help out with the little kids, go to a nursing home... Or do they ever say, “I'll leave the choice up to you,” even though you know what they really want? Parents are weird.

I Samuel 1-3 tells the story of another weird parent, a mom named Hannah. She hadn't been able to have children, but she promised God that if he would give her a son, she would devote him to God completely. God answered her prayer, and she took her little boy to the place of worship to work with the priests there. Every year (maybe the only time she saw him all year!) she would travel in and give him a new little robe she had made for him. Samuel grew up, loved by both God and men. And one night, Samuel heard God speaking to him. He wasn't sure whose voice it was, but his mentor, Eli, helped him understand. When God called Samuel again, he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

I think the reason parents are weird (and I'm going to put myself with them now) is that we want to be like Hannah. God has given you to us, and we love you very much. We want to give you everything, but because we love God even



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more, we want to give you to God. We want to devote you to him. That's why it hurts us when you don't want to come to church or spend time with the youth group. That's why we cry at baptisms or when you say your first prayer in public. We'll serve you in ways you see and in ways you don't see. We'll give up our own desires for what's best for you. And we'll put you in touch with other godly people so that when God calls you, you're ready to say, "Here I am, Lord."

The problem is that we would like for you to grow spiritually, but three actors are needed for the process, just like in the story of Samuel. God works (we know that), parents work (we're doing our best), but you also have to work. We don't decide anymore that you're going to be a priest in the way that Hannah did. You have to decide that you're going to make your life a living sacrifice, that you're going to take up your cross and follow Jesus, that you're going to become a vital

part of a community of faith. We want you to do that so very badly, and we're going to do everything we can to help you, but we know that ultimately it's your decision.

So listen: you be like Samuel, okay? Rise up when God calls you. But try not to complain too much when we weird parent-types act like Hannah.

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BROTHERHOOD NEWS — Mark Hudson

GREENVILLE, NC...

A final report on Hurricane Floyd Disaster Assistance has been issued by the Greenville Church of Christ. According to Carl Etchison 110 churches and numerous individuals from 30 states sent financial assistance totaling over \$342,000. Among the items the church provided disaster victims were: more than 3,000 family food

boxes, \$20,000 in food vouchers, more than 700 personal care boxes, more than 500 baby care items, 90,000 cans of water, 85 sets of new appliances, 220 new beds (along with more than a thousand blankets), and more than 550 cleaning kits. Phase 3 of the disaster relief saw 42 sites repaired at a value of \$130,000. In addition, 5,000 Bibles were given

away and 3,000 sermon tapes. The worth of all donated food and merchandise was placed at \$550,000.

CHARLOTTE, NC...

David French has resigned his position at the Archdale Church of Christ in Charlotte and has accepted the ministry position at the Pine Valley Church of Christ in Wilmington, NC.

Parenting Principles for Preachersand Other Church Leaders

fathers, do not
embitter your
children, or they will become
discouraged," (Colossians 3:21).

One preacher confessed, "Before I had children, I had a number of theories on child-rearing. Later, I had several children and quickly ran out of theories." Those in full time ministry, like other parents, experience feelings of frustration or perhaps even desperation in their attempts to rear godly kids in an ungodly world. There are no sure-fire theories and kids don't come with guarantees. Much of what parents learn about child-rearing comes the hard way and many, when the children are grown, have their share of "if I had it all to do over again" stories. Where theories fail, perhaps some tried and true principles can help. Following are a few that my wife (Kay) and I have learned in thirty seven years of marriage, having raised four children in ministry.

1. *Let your children know that your marriage comes first.* Preacher, love your wife. Children learn marital skills by observing their parents. The greatest gift a father can give his children is to give his marriage the priority God requires. Just as loving Christ more than your wife makes you a better husband, so giving your mate priority makes you a better father. In Scripture the admonition for husbands to "love your wife as Christ loves the church" (Ephesians 5:25) precedes and supercedes the command for fathers to "bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Truitt Adair

2. *Minister to the needs of your children.* Recognize

that your children also have souls and spiritual needs. Spending time with you family is a vital part of your ministry. If you win the world and lose your own kids, then what have you accomplished? On the average, fathers spend only six minutes per day in meaningful conversation with their children. A preacher who only spends six minutes a day ministering to prospects and church members is likely to be fired! You'll never see a father's tombstone epitaph that reads, "I wish I had spent more time at the office," but many fathers wish too late that they had spent more time with their children. Old Testament fathers were to impress the love of God on the hearts and minds of their children while sitting together at home, while traveling together, at bedtime and at breakfast (Deuteronomy 6:7). Their responsibility required more than six minutes a day! So does ours.

3. *Reject the preacher's kid double standard.* Avoid holding your children to a tougher PK standard while you hold the brethren and their kids to a different standard. The highest standard to which anyone can aspire is "Christian." Expect your children to be Christians, noting more and nothing less. Avoid like the plague those dreaded words, "You can't do that because you're the preacher's kid." Help your family to be a "normal" Christian family and a real part of the congregation. The more your family develops normal and healthy Christian

relationships in the church, the less pronounced the "fish bowl" complex becomes and the more healthy and holistic their view of ministry can become. The jaundiced eye through which some grown-up children of preachers see ministry may be the result of constantly being measured by a faulty and impossible standard.

4. *Choose your battles carefully.* Some things are more important than other things. Some issues and decisions are matters of "life and death" (Galatians 1:6-9) while others are matters of expedience or opinion (Romans 14:1-5). If you treat every decision and conflict with the same degree of inflexibility your children will become confused and embittered and you will lose influence with them. Learn when to dig your heels in and when to allow children more freedom. You can't die on every hill. Some aren't worth dying on. So save your strength, influence and ammunition for the really important battles. This will be the greatest lesson in Christian priorities you can teach your children.

5. *Be lavish with love and praise and sparing with criticism.* Our Father in heaven has lavished His love, kindness and grace on us (Ephesians 1:7-8). Children learn their first and often most lasting impression of the heavenly Father by observing their earthly father. Both permissiveness and hyper-criticism are parental extremes. However, surveys have demonstrated that even permissive Carolina Christian

parents generally have better results than those who are constantly critical. Aim for a balanced approach, but if you must err, err on the side of love and grace. Speak often of your love for your children. Hug them. Kiss them. Let them know they are special to you and to God. Yes, discipline them, but do it as God does—out of great love for them (Hebrews 12:5).

6. *Never let your children drive a wedge in your marriage.* Kids learn quickly to play one parent against the other. Never allow your children to be disrespectful of their mother. Never talk down to your wife or speak disparagingly about her in the presence of the children (or in anyone else's presence for that matter). Support each other and present a united front. If you disagree on a decision, meet privately and work it out, and then make the decision unanimous with the children. Your children will learn respect for authority, family functionality and good leadership skills in a united home.

7. *Admit to your own mistakes.* When you admit what your children already know, you win their hearts and respect. You also teach them the biblical principle that we are all sinners and fall short of God's glory. Let them know that you aspire to being a good parent, but sometimes you fail. And when you do, ask for their forgiveness, especially when your mistake has hurt them. Your honesty will make it easier for them to come to you with their own struggles, hurts and mistakes.

Truitt Adair is Director of Sunset International Bible Institute. He can be contacted at 3723 34th

Thousands of Christians are Dying in Ethiopia

hundreds of Gospel preachers reported

Don Yelton

many other church leaders about needs in their congregations. They

that thousands of Christians have already died and others are dying in Ethiopia. Dr. Behailu Abebe, Director of the Church of Christ Mission in Addis Ababa; John Ed Clark, elder of the Woodward Park congregation in Fresno, California; David Goolsby, Director of Agricultural Relief, Healing Hands International in Nashville, Tennessee; Jerry Senn, elder and preacher for the Hendersonville, N. C. Church of Christ; and Don Yelton, Director of the WFR Relief Ministries spent a week visiting churches and their leaders in Southern Ethiopia during mid-August. We immediately began distributing food, clothes and small amounts of other aid that could be obtained locally to the poorest of the poor.

Leaders of more than one hundred churches of Christ urged a plan be adopted to relieve their suffering and help them prepare for future droughts. The long-term plan agreed upon by the team and the church leaders has three phases:

1. Immediate food, seed, fertilizer, and medical care is now being supplied for as many people as we have funds for. This phase will continue as long as the need and funds last. Shipping of supplies is not feasible at this point.

2. Dig new wells and repair existing unusable water supplies particularly near church buildings and preacher training schools.

3. Survival gardens: teaching drip irrigation and raised bed techniques for improving agriculture.

On one occasion we spoke to sixty-eight preachers representing more than 5,000 members. We asked this group and

reported that they didn't have time to get to all the funerals of their members and in their communities.

We asked them what message they wanted to send to churches of Christ around the world. They replied in chorus, "Pray for us!" We promised that we would ask all Christians to appeal to God on their behalf.

White's Ferry Road Relief Ministries, Healing Hands International and Christian Relief Fund are sending funds to help Christians in Southern Ethiopia. Brother Behailu and other Christians are working hard to make sure that the poorest Christians and their neighbors receive what they need to sustain life.

Some 65,000 members of the churches of Christ live in Southern Ethiopia where the drought is having a major impact. In the 1980's we fed some 200,000 Moslems in Northern Ethiopia. Today, Christians are suffering. If you have already helped us, God bless you, here is your report. If you haven't contributed, please consider helping save the lives of our brethren.

You may send your contribution to:
White's Ferry Road Church of Christ
Relief Ministries, (African Famine Relief)
3201 North Seventh Street
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May God save our brothers and sisters and their children in Ethiopia.

Don Yelton worships with the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville, NC, and has been involved in the White's Ferry Road Relief Ministries for many years. He can be contacted by Email at: donyelton@wfrchurch.org. For more information about the African Famine Relief, check the WFR website at wfrchurch.org.

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"In everything give thanks..."

1 Thessalonians 5:18



CAROLINA christian

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We Give Thanks.....

t

urkey and dressing.
Football games.

Dennis Conner

Family. Alka-Seltzer. Ah yes, it's that time of year again—Thanksgiving. Once again families will engage in all the traditional fare, and some will even pause to actually give thanks (I wonder who atheists will thank?). I always appreciate this time of year because it makes for ready editorial fodder.

"What shall I write about this month? Hmmmmm. Let's see, it's November. Oh, how about Thanksgiving?" And it's pretty easy to write about Thanksgiving: Christians should be thankful every

day, etc. But just when you get comfortable and begin taking something for granted, life has a way of reminding you what it really is all about. Both this November and last have not allowed me to forget about the important things for which I am compelled to be thankful.

Last November my wife, Terre, underwent a bone marrow transplant as part of her treatment for breast cancer. We spent the entire month (including Thanksgiving) in an apartment in Winston-Salem, near her doctor and away from our beloved old house in the country. Unfortunately, the procedure did not work and Terre has had two recurrences this year. Recently we were told that, barring a miracle, the cancer cannot

be cured. Her doctors will keep a close watch on it and they will keep treating it as it appears, hoping to keep it away from any of the vital organs. So what, someone may ask, is there to be thankful for this year?

Very simply, more than I could have dreamt of. I am thankful for every day I have with Terre (though none of us is guaranteed tomorrow), and am blessed to be a daily witness to such faith and grace of character. Thankful for the numerous opportunities our sovereign Lord has made available for Terre to

minister to so many others as a result of her illness (and she has not missed a one of them). I am thankful for the love of our families and the outpouring of prayer from literally thousands of people. I thank God for a loving and supportive church family (no preacher has ever been more blessed) and for faithful friends. And then, or course, there is the cross of Jesus and the ever amazing grace of God. And that's just for starters.

Scripture is saturated with calls to and expressions of thanksgiving.

"It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High," (Psalm 92:1).

"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanks-

*"But just when you
get comfortable
and begin taking
something for
granted. life has a
way of reminding
you what it really
is all about."*

giving," (Psalm 69:30).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving," (Colossians 4:2).

"...Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Ephesians 5:20).

"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name," (Hebrews 13:15).

The people of God are to be a thankful people, regardless of life situations. As our brother Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers, "...in everything give thanks; for this is the will

of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

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Urgent Need!

Traditional or Non-Traditional?

We frequently hear these terms today. Quite often the question is asked, "Is your church traditional or non-traditional?" The question may also utilize other terms like "formal vs. contemporary." "Do you have a formal worship service or is it more contemporary?"

Perhaps you've had someone ask you that question and you weren't exactly sure how to answer. Some of us have developed some rather defensive responses designed not to choose between the two alternatives of traditional and non-traditional. "Is your church traditional or non-traditional?" "Yes," is sometimes an answer that is given. "We're neither; we're biblical." Or how about, "I'm not into labels."

Most of us are both and neither traditional/non-traditional. Perhaps, then, "yes" is the most appropriate answer. All churches do things that are a change from the past, which pushes them in the direction of non-traditional, while

Ron Newberry

maintaining a secure hold to the past in other practices, which pulls them toward traditional.

Of course, the underlying reticence to declare one or the other is likely rooted in the mistaken assumption that one or the other is "wrong" or at least "undesirable." Such an assumption is flawed. There is nothing inherently wrong with a traditional church nor is there anything inherently right about a non-traditional church, and vice versa. God does not care one way or the other as long as the church in question is fulfilling *His* agenda in the cultural context in which it is planted. Jesus observed numerous traditions while at other times shaking Judaism to its roots by engaging in non-traditional behavior. His only concern was with heaven's agenda.

How then does that translate into real life? Paul provides some insight in 1 Corinthians 9:22b-23 when he wrote, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." As I understand scripture, this would simply mean that any church that wishes to be the church of God in the community must adapt itself to its cultural context without compromising the essential nature and elements of the gospel of Christ. God's agenda is souls, not "traditional" vs. "non-traditional."

Ron's series "The Church and Morality" will continue next month.

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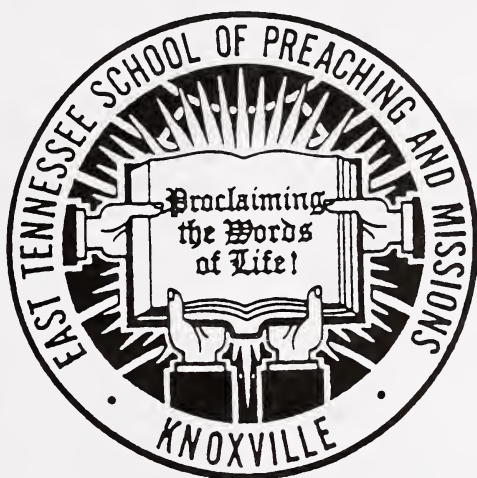
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Thanks Bill and Kay.....

Bill Smith and his lovely wife, Kay, have been a model of perseverance and dedication. Bill has served on the board of directors of *Carolina Christian* for 38 years and for 30 of those years he has been responsible for time consuming and demanding task of mailing out the magazine every month. He has literally had to plan his life at times around the mailing of the magazine. He has also been serving as the treasurer. Kay has been right there by his side all the way, unselfishly devoting her

own time and energies. They have both worked tirelessly behind the scenes, doing the work that no one else wants to do.

Bill is a retired school teacher and he and Kay now spend most of their time traveling around the country. Now, he is also retiring from the Board of Directors of *Carolina Christian*. Bill and Kay cannot be replaced, only followed. Words are simply inadequate for expressing the depth of our gratitude to them both. Thank you Bill and thank you Kay. Drive safely!

Changes on the Horizon

The coming New Year will see a number of significant changes for *Carolina Christian*. First and foremost, the publication frequency of the magazine will change to bi-monthly, allowing us to save on printing and mailing costs. We also believe that this will allow us to make some format changes that will make *Carolina Christian* even more appealing to our readers. For instance, the number of pages will be expanded from 18 to 32, allowing us to add new feature columns.

We will also be consolidating our various departments (mailing, billing, subscriptions) in one location (Yadkinville). For the past several years those responsibilities have been divided between three different locations. You can only imagine some of the logistical challenges we have faced from time to time. Consolidation will allow us to greatly improve our service to you, our subscribers.

Finally, Jerry Senn—a *Carolina Christian* board member and preacher for the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville,

NC—has for several years served as Managing Editor for the magazine (with his wife, Brenda, providing invaluable assistance). Family and ministry responsibilities have made it necessary for Jerry to relinquish his Managing Editor duties. Jerry will continue as a member of the board and will be contributing articles from time to time. We deeply appreciate everything he and Brenda have done. Jerry will be succeeded by Richard Boese, a member of the Yadkinville Church of Christ. Richard will be responsible for all subscriptions and for the mailing of the magazine. And, as if that weren't enough, Richard will also be serving as Treasurer, taking over for Bill Smith. We gladly welcome Richard to the staff of *Carolina Christian*.

Although we are all unpaid volunteers, we are dedicated to giving you the best product and service for your money that we possibly can. We ask you to be patient as the new changes are implemented and always encourage your questions and responses.

...Is It In Your Head or Your Heart?

Peter, Andrew,
James and John had

Peter Rode

“heart,” not “head.” There’s a
great temptation to keep

received no Rabbinic schooling. Luke tells us that the Sanhedrin considered them to be “unschooled, ordinary men” (Acts 5:13).

They were just “laymen”—in fact, fishermen. Their fathers were fishermen, and probably their fathers’ fathers had been fishermen too. They had been a fishing family for generations and they knew nothing else. Their lives—past and future—were tied up in their boats and the fish and the lake. Then one day Jesus passed by and called them to follow Him. They left behind all they knew and followed (Mark 1:14-20)! These and other apostles illustrate very clearly the point I want to make: being a Christian is not merely a matter of *believing*—it’s also a matter of *following*.

After materialism, the greatest threat to real, living, life-changing Christianity is intellectualism. Don’t misunderstand me. We’re meant to have an intellectual, thinking faith. That’s what the Bereans had and they were commended for it (Acts 17:11). God gives us a mind and He expects us to use it. He expects us to study our Bibles and to know what we believe so we’re no longer “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). But there’s a real danger that we can allow our faith and knowledge to degenerate into mere theology.

Sometimes it’s tempting to turn a living experience into an academic exercise where all we know about God is what we’ve read, or what we’ve heard. In the book of Psalms David wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart” (Psalm 119:11). Note that David said

God’s word hostage in our heads. We can do much with it while it’s up there. We can think about it. We can memorize it. We can debate it. We can preach it. We can win arguments with it, and we can use it to split churches and hurt other people. But, we *cannot* ignore it! As long as we don’t let it out of our heads and into our hearts, the Word of God can never change our lives. Intellectualism is keeping it in our heads. Christian living is hiding it in our hearts.

Peter, Andrew, James and John could have listened to all that Jesus had to say and then spent the rest of their lives in stimulating theological debate while they mended their nets after a day’s fishing—but they didn’t. When He called them, they went, leaving behind the security of a steady business, a family and a home. The temptation to substitute Christian talk, Christian organization and Christian intellectualism for real Christian discipleship is still very strong. But that isn’t what God wants. When He calls us, He wants us also to lay aside all the things of the world that are going to get in our way, and follow Him. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it...” (Matthew 16:24-25).

I hope you’ve heard the call of Jesus and are truly following Him by hiding His words in your heart as you live out your faith every hour of every day.

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Family Ties

The Blessing

ary Smalley's book, *The Blessing*,

Johnny Melton

our children, according to Smalley, is by picturing a

encourages modern fathers to pass a spiritual blessing to their children. A blessing, according to Smalley, is more than taking them to church or praying with them or setting a good example, it's more than that. Here are five practical Dr. Smalley encourages fathers to bless their children.

The number one way to pass on a blessing is a meaningful touch. The Bible depicts Jacob embracing, kissing, and laying his hands on his sons and grandchildren. By giving our children a hug or a touch or an arm about the shoulder or butterfly kisses, we communicate love and a blessing.

Second, Smalley says we pass on a blessing through verbal affirmation. Tell your children: "I'm proud of you." "You've done that well." "I love you."

Third, we pass along a blessing by attaching value to them. To bless means to honor. We honor our children by letting them know that they are valuable to us—they're the most important people in the world to us. That means we sacrifice time for them. That means we look them in the eye when they talk to them, and we stop and we listen to them. Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer's counsel from his book, *Life Together*:

Anyone who thinks his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother. . . . Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.

A fourth way to pass along a blessing to Carolina Christian

positive future for them. At the close of his life, recorded in Genesis 49, Jacob pronounced a positive future on Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher and the others. We can bless our children by recognizing and valuing their gifts and talents, and then picturing for them a positive future. "You really love people. You'd make a great salesman some day." "The way you love animals, you'd be a good veterinarian." "You want to be a policeman. That means you're courageous." "The way you love church, you're going to be a great church leader some day." That kind of encouragement is behind the often misunderstood proverb, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Literally, the proverb says train a child in "his own" way. Point your children toward a future that is consistent with their aptitude and gifts.

The fifth way we bless our children is by an active commitment. It's not enough to speak the words. There has to be a willingness in the parent to sacrifice for the child, to pray, to spend time in helping develop their gifts, to spend money for lessons and for higher education.

As Father's Day approaches, may God help dads understand that fulfilling the responsibility to rear their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) includes not only disciplining them, but blessing them, as well.

Johnny Melton is a former editor of *Carolina Christian* and is presently preaching for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS.

.....God's Messengers

W

hat do you think of

David Kneip

when I say the word "priest"? Does it remind you of old movies—the guy in the long black cloak trying to exorcize a demon or get rid of some other evil? I think of someone giving a dying person last rites. Guess what, friends? *We* are priests. I know that word kind of has a bad taste for us sometimes, but still, we are all priests.

Let me tell you a story about that. Once, long ago, there was a large group of people who were being oppressed by a wicked king. They had cried out to God and God had delivered them from their oppression through a man whom God had chosen, as well as through some amazing miracles. After God saved the people, He took them out into the desert on their way to the land He was going to give them for their home and then led them to a mountain. On that mountain He gave the people the option to follow Him—to be His people. The people accepted, and then God told them what that acceptance would mean for how they would act; what you believe should affect the way you act.

Does the story sound familiar? It's the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. I want to focus your attention, though, on one particular passage in Exodus 19: "...Out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (vv. 5-6). These are the words God told Moses to say to the Israelites. They accepted God's offer and so, somehow, became this kingdom of priests.

The reason I believe this affects us is

that the notion of "priests" is not something that disap-

peared when Jesus came. We have an idea sometimes that all of the Old Testament became useless, or invalid, once Jesus arrived on the scene, and that's just not true. The book of 1 Peter also addresses an oppressed people. In chapter 2 of that book Peter says: "...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." (v. 9). Do you see it? Peter is telling the people that they are still God's priesthood, and I think his words extend to us.

Even if I've convinced you that this is true, you may still be asking, "So what, Kneip? What does that mean?" Good question. Let me offer two answers.

First, being a priest means that you bring God to the people and the people to God. Those are the jobs of the old covenant priests, and they're our jobs today as New Covenant priests. This month we're going to talk a little about how we can bring God to the people; next month we'll do the flip side.

The priests in the Old Testament brought God to the people as teachers in the community. Most of us, especially young men and women, don't have opportunities to be teachers. The Bible does give us some ideas, though, about other ways we can reach people. The text in 1 Peter says that we are a priesthood so that we can declare God's praises. Priests offer up sacrifices, and Romans 12:1-2 says that we are to offer our bodies as a sacrifice by not being conformed to the ways of the world, and in Romans 15 Paul says that

part of a priest's job is to proclaim the gospel. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:16 that we should let our light shine before others so that when they see our good deeds, they are moved to praise God. If I had to sum that up, I would say that the Bible is telling us that our entire lives should be announcing the work of God in the world. Through our actions, our reactions, our words, and even our thoughts, we can proclaim that God wants to save people.

Where, though, can we do this? Is it possible to do it at school? I mean, that's where people make fun of you for anything! Yes, I think you can. Let me encourage you to think of practicing at home and at church. I know that people in your family and at your church can be harsh, too, but I hope that those are safe places for you, places where you can try to tell others about Jesus. It is hard at school, I know. People are concerned about you not infringing on their rights and respecting their freedom. But there are ways. I have a friend who, after she got to know Jesus, began to tell some friends that she had "a new man in her life." Some of her friends have started attending worship with her. Another friend was unsure of himself until someone he worked with had a sick family member and he was able to tell this person about how a family at his church had worked through losing their daughter in a car wreck. If you're in competitive situations a lot, just being compassionate and humble can speak volumes about what God has done in your life.

One of my favorite things that Jesus says is in Matthew 12:34, "...Out of the Carolina Christian

overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." Whatever your heart is full of will spill over into your life. That's kind of scary, because my heart is often not very pure. Pray for God to purify your heart, because as He does, it will become easier to let what's in there overflow into your life. I know it's scary, but you can do it with God's help.

Now, let me ask you a question: if you lived that life out in those places in front of me, and I asked you what was going on, what would you say? What is it exactly that you are trying to tell people? There's probably as many different answers as there are Christians, but here are some suggestions from the New Testament. From Peter, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Mark 8:29). From John, "The Word has become flesh, and he has lived among us" (John 1:14). From Paul, "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). But this might be the best of all, and certainly the simplest thing to say: "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9). Jesus is the Lord of my life. He's the reason I'm living this crazy way. He's the reason I act differently and speak differently and hopefully even think differently. He's my best friend. I love Him and He loves me.

Guys, we are an oppressed people, just like the people of Exodus and 1 Peter. The world really doesn't like Christians, but I hope that knowing that God has chosen you to be His priests will encourage you when you're down. And telling others that Jesus is Lord can help heal our world.

Bring God to the people, guys. Lord willing, see you next month!

*You want more out of life than just
a degree to hang on the wall.
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Final Answer?

t

he music plays in the background. The

Kent Massey

only lights in the studio are focused on you. Small beads of sweat begin to pop out on your forehead.

"Who was the sixteenth president of the United States?"

You have four choices to pick from. Ulysses S. Grant, Franklin Pierce, Millard Fillmore, or Abraham Lincoln. Slowly you begin to eliminate them only by one, taking your time but feeling the pressure mount. "Grant doesn't feel right...Pierce—was he really ever a president? Fillmore sounds presidential...Lincoln, he was somewhere around the 20th." Your confidence grows with Millard Fillmore and the more you think about it the more certain you feel. "Millard Fillmore." "Is that your final answer?"

"Yes" you say, with as much conviction as you can muster. "It's my final answer."

"Wrong," (the correct answer in Lincoln).

That scene has been played out in millions of homes across America. The dapperly dressed Regis Philbin has excited, exasperated and exhausted us with his hit TV show, "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" Contestants from across the country gather with the hope to be selected to participate in this latest get rich quick fad that is sweeping America.

The desire for instant wealth and the obsession with it has spawned a number Carolina Christian

of offshoots. Even the Fox network has weighed into the fray with a show simply entitled "Greed." This show has a \$2 million jackpot that contestants are vying for. A team of six people attempt to move up the "Tower of Greed," beginning with questions valued at \$25,000 all the way to \$2 million. The host displays the money openly and contestants are encouraged to smell, feel and hold the money. But one wrong answer sends the team home with zero. As the prize money increases, "terminator rounds" pit contestants against each other. The show has doubled the Thursday night Fox viewing audience.

With a show like "Greed," it makes you wonder what sin could be next. Lust? Gluttony? Laziness? You just never know anymore.

We live in a nation that is suffering from millionaire angst and we seem unsure what to do about it. People are gambling more than ever. Credit card debt continues to soar. Bankruptcy filings increase every year. We are trying to save our lives by building bigger barns. But Jesus poses a question in the "Game of Life" that should stop all of us in our tracks. "For what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet lose his soul?" (Mark 8:35).

Tough question. Final answer?

Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. In a time where we seem to be "greeding" one another instead of greeting one another, we need to recall the warnings of scripture. The Old

Testament reminds us, "The greedy person stirs up strife, but whoever trusts in the Lord will be enriched," (Proverbs 15:27). Paul reminds us that greed will not inherit the kingdom of God (1Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 5:5).

In playing the "Game of Life," maybe we can take a cue from "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire." When a contestant is not sure of the right answer, he or she has three lifelines: the 50/50 option removes two wrong answers, thus enhancing one's chances; the "Ask the Audience" lifeline lets the contestant ask the audience for help with an answer; and the remaining lifeline is the "Phone a Friend" option which allows the player to phone someone for an answer.

Maybe the question Jesus asks in Mark 8:36 is one that we struggle to answer. Then God gives us some lifelines to use when we are not sure of the final answer.

Lifeline One (50/50): the Bible. When we are in a situation in life where we need to have the wrong answers removed, the Bible is the place to turn. Scripture gives us guidance, balance and the help to make the right decision every time. And the best thing is that the Bible will always give us the right answer—but will we always do what it says?

Lifeline Two (Ask the Audience): ask your Christian friends. We can poll those we have developed strong godly relationships with and seek their guidance and prayers. That is the importance of belonging to a congregation and having people you trust hold you accountable.

Our friends are there to warn and confront us with sin, yet affirm and encourage while we seek God's will for our lives.

Lifeline Three (Phone a Friend):

Jesus. Jesus models for us the right answers and shows us the way to live and make good decisions. The one who had it all gave it all up so that we could be more blessed than we could ever imagine. Jesus had no greed in His life. And Jesus is a friend who always knows the right answers.

However, like the show, we get to pick the final answer. Though the right answers are always there in the Bible, and our Christian family tells us the right things to do, and we have Jesus who *always* knows what is best, the final choice is still ours.

So heed the words of Jesus and listen closely, and maybe you will hear him asking you, "Is that your final answer?" How well are you playing? And what is your final answer?

Kent Massey serves the Providence Rd. church in Charlotte and can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28211.

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The Long Line of Faith

Recently I have heard it suggested that unless one has a drastic conversion experience, then he (or she) hasn't really been converted. And from others who had been "drug-up in the church," that they envy those converts who came from a worldly background. While I readily admit that the angels rejoice when someone leaves the world behind and that my soul is thrilled by the dramatic stories of many, I would also submit that God intends for faith in Him to be passed from generation to generation.

Consider the following examples. After Abraham was called by God, the Lord instructed him to "charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice..." (Genesis 18:19). Because of Abraham's faithfulness in passing on his faith in God the nation of Israel came into existence.

In Exodus, with the institution of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the redemption of the firstborn, God told the Israelites

Rita Watson

that when their children asked them why they did these things they were to tell the children of God's works and glory (Exodus 12; 13:8).

In Deuteronomy 6:4 the Shema of Israel is followed by these words: "And these words I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise..."

Further, in Joshua 4 the Israelites are instructed to set up "standing stones" as a memorial so that when their children say, "What do these stones mean to you?" the Israelites would be able to recount God's goodness and magnificence. In his letter to his young friend, Timothy, Paul spoke of the faith that first dwelt in Lois and Eunice and was then passed on to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5). Paul understood the faith-shaping efforts of Timothy's mother and grandmother to be a blessing.

**"...God
intends for
faith in
Him to be
passed from
generation
to
generation."**

But God's intention is perhaps best expressed in Psalm 78:

*"...I will utter sayings from of old,
things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD,
and his might,
and the wonders which he has wrought.
He established a testimony in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded to the fathers
to teach their children;
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments."*

continued on page 18

God expects His children to pass on the faith to each generation for three reasons. First, so that each new generation can set their hope in Him. Second, so that they will not forget the works of God. And third, so they will be obedient to Him.

This is also the hope for those who come to God out of a worldly background. That their families can for coming generations be children of God. That those who come after them will have hope and will know the wonders of God and will keep His commandments.

So, if you are blessed to have come from a long line of faith, be grateful to God Almighty and continue the telling of what God has done into the next generations. And if you have been converted from the world, be grateful to God and start your own long line of faith. This is what God intends.

Rita Watson can be contacted at 2163 Oak Grove Rd., Red Boiling Springs, TN 37150.



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Surfside Beach, SC...

In July, 2000, Dr. Patrick Mead began his work as newpreacher for the *Grand Strand Church of Christ*. Prior to moving to South Carolina, he preached for the church in Lancaster, Ohio for six and a half years.

Myrtle Beach, SC...

The *Myrtle Beach Church of Christ* has moved into a new facility. The new location, 450 Wild Iris Drive, is at the northwest corner of 38th Avenue North and 17 Bypass at the entrance of Plantation Point. The facility is 16,400 square feet with an auditorium that seats 554, 14

classrooms, a library, conference room, offices, and a large fellowship hall. Donnie Barnes is the preacher. In conjunction with the dedication of the building, the church hosted a gospel meeting with Willard Collins on October 15-17.

Hendersonville, NC...

Danny Boggs, who has been serving the Hendersonville church as associate and youth minister, has announced that he and his family will be moving to Blythville, Arkansas to serve the church there as its preacher. He has been with the Hendersonville church for eight and a half years.

Jerry Senn, preacher and elder for the congregation, wrote in the church bulletin, "From my first meeting with Danny I was impressed with his humble spirit and his strong determination to serve Christ... Only eternity will reveal the many lives he has touched."

Raleigh, NC...

The *Rochester Heights Church of Christ* will host its 12th annual Woman's Day on April 6-7. The theme will be "Mary, Mary, Mary" and the program will be conducted at the facility of the Brooks Ave. church, 700 Brooks Avenue. For more information call (919) 856-1722 or (919) 552-1315.

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**“Blessed is the
LORD GOD
of Israel;
for He has
visited and
redeemed
His People.”**

Luke 1:68

CAROLINA christian

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Living in Harmony.....

F

or all our rhetoric about "the one church," the fact is that there are two churches: the church of our idealism and the church of reality. Or to put it in more modern parlance, there is the virtual church and the real church. And there is usually a significant gap between the two.

In the best of times, the real church approaches the ideal: a loving, caring, Christ-centered, others-oriented community of faith. At other times, the real church can be a harsh place where people are disappointed and shattered and the holy name of God is drug through the mud by our shameful hypocrisies. Yet, for all its failings and imperfections, God has still seen fit to use the church as the instrument through which He reveals His multifaceted wisdom. In his book *Wheat That Springeth Green*, J. F. Powers has one of his characters saying, "This is a big old ship, Bill. She creaks, she rolls...but she gets where she's going. Always has, always will, until the end of time. With or without you." Well, he could just as easily be speaking of the church. By the grace of God, she will get where

Dennis Conner

she's going.

We are called to live

in the real church, among flawed and imperfect people (people like ourselves). There is much more to Christianity than an intellectual,

internal faith. The Christian faith can only be lived in community. It is about much more than a body of doctrines that must be embraced; it is fundamentally about relationships. First, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And deriving from that, relationships with other people. The ideal is that we live with

**"The
Christian
faith
can only be
lived in
community."**

one another in peace and harmony. This is the ideal that Paul reiterates to the Corinthian church, a church riddled with disharmony: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," (1 Corinthians 1:10). This text expresses the ideal of Christian harmony. It is not, however, an appeal to template uniformity in doctrinal beliefs. To insist that we all believe *everything* in *exactly* the same way is not unity.

Our own history has demonstrated the practical impossibility of doctrinal uniformity. In our "unity movement" we have no less than a dozen different factions! We are not called to uniformity, but harmony. As Rupert Davies writes in his commentary *A Colony of Heaven*, "Christian unity has plenty of room for difference of opinion; what it has not room for is bitterness or distrust or exclusiveness." Paul was calling the Corinthians to a fundamental harmony in their relationships with one another.

But is such harmony possible? Yes, or Paul would not have called the Corinthians to it. But how is it possible? We find the answer in another admonition of Paul to another collection of flawed, but redeemed, people. Take your Bible (go ahead, I'll wait) and read Philippians 2:1-4.

Here we find that the key to harmony is *humility*.

The fabric of harmony in Philippi was about to unravel. Why? Because some had ceased to love those with whom they disagreed. Disharmony does not result merely from a difference of opinion or conviction. Rather, the root cause of disharmony is the *love of self*. There can only be harmony with selflessness (humility), and not selfishness, is the ruling principle. This raises yet another question: what does it mean to be humble?

It means that we have a true sense of our own worth. In verse 3 Carolina Christian

Paul writes, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit..." Here he addresses those who have a false sense of worth. "Selfish ambition" has to do with factiousness—the pressing of one's own rights or agenda. "Conceit" refers to one who assertively, arrogantly claims to have the right view, but is in fact wrong. A true sense of our own worth, then, recognizes very simply that self is something to be sacrificed, not asserted. Harmony is impossible if each is out for himself, promoting his or her own agenda, seeking one's own advantage. The person who is humble does not confuse his own agenda with Christ's agenda and is more willing to promote others than himself.

Second, **it means to value others at their true worth.** "...in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others," (2:3b-4). The true worth of others is almost always more than we want to admit. In our own eyes, our needs are more important and more urgent than the needs of others in the body. Humility operates on the opposite assumption. This is not to

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day, however, that humility denies the legitimacy of one's own need; it just puts them in proper perspective. That is, humility recognizes that the needs of others are more important than my own. Yes, I have needs, but it is more important that your needs be taken care of before I think about my own.

This truth flies in the face of both secular and the predominant church culture today (which, unfortunately, are sometimes one and the same). How many times have we heard the complaint, "I'm looking for another church home because my needs just aren't being met here." Unquestionably there are times when the complaint may be valid, but it should be voiced only when I have first asked myself, "What exactly have I been doing to meet the needs of others." To borrow (and amend) a thought from President Kennedy's inaugural speech, "Ask not what the church can do for you, but ask what you can do for the church." In order for harmony to exist, we must value the needs of others above our own.

Humility is not something we can merely will ourselves to be, however. It is a response. More specifically, it is our response to the humiliation of Jesus on the cross. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross," (2:5). There is more to the cross

than sentimental song lyrics and abstract theology; it is a way of life. The Lord put it this way, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily..." For Christ the cross meant death in the course of serving the needs of others, and for us it means no less. We are called to die every day, and even a hundred times every day. Every time I say "no" to my need and "yes" to yours, I have died to self. Every time you deny yourself and become a servant to me, a crucifixion takes place. Life in the Spirit, indeed, is a life of death. There is a sense, then, in which the harmonious church is a dead church; that is, harmony can exist only in a climate in which the mind of Christ dominates and folks are consistently dying to themselves for the sake of others.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace..." Yes, on earth, peace. And especially in the church.

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The Church and Morality:

The Conscience (9)

Conscience (the inner sense of right and wrong) remains an important factor in determining our behavior. However, the point of reference for the conscience is not the standards established by the community in which we live. The point of reference is God.

Paul spoke about his *good conscience* in such texts as Acts 23:1 (cf. 2 Timothy 1:3; Acts 24:16). If one is careful to note the context of Acts 23:1, there is a clear indication that his living in all good conscience was done before God. "The conscience is the jury in the inner court of appeal where morally dubious action must be judged" (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 170). For Paul the proper formation of the conscience takes place within the framework of revealed truth.

Here is the connection with last month's article dealing with honor and shame. In scripture the true essence of honor and shame have to do with our standing before God. They have to do with the ultimate eschatological impact on present life. The preeminent relationship with God through Jesus Christ is a moral centered relationship because God is profoundly holy in his very being.

Ron Newberry

Therefore, honor is what God bestows upon us (2 Corinthians 2:8; Hebrews 2:7) and shame is what results from our fall into sin.

*"The cross
has covered
the shame
— moral
and spiri-
tual shame
— of those
who have
faith."*

What then is the function of the cross of Christ in this regard? The cross has covered the shame—moral and spiritual shame—of those who have faith. They never fear being exposed again for who they were. Christ's shame on the cross was God's method of rescuing the lost honor of us sinners (1 Corinthians 6:20) and exposing to shame our spiritual enemies (Colossians 2:15).

Consider the contrast between those covered by Christ and those exposed. In our

world where guilt has not been removed, where minds are set on earthly things (Philippians 3:19) and shame remains, the offense of sin ascends before God daily. Those who live persistently and decidedly in their sins are the ones who are shameful before God (Jude 13; Romans 1:27; 6:21; 2 Timothy 2:15; Ephesians 4:19). On the other hand, those who are in Christ, who serve God, who have been reconciled by the blood of Jesus and live by the

power of the Holy Spirit have had all their guilt and shame removed. Those who "by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Romans 2:7).

The conscience can be clear and provide trained (via the Scriptures) guidance. Through adoption into the family of God we receive all the blessings of an heir of God (Romans 8:15-17). That is the ultimate honor. Shame, the ultimate dishonor, was dealt a death blow at the death of Christ. The ultimate sense of shame (the knowledge of not being who we ought to be and the fear of exposure) is experienced in the

presence of God who sees to the very core of our heart. The whole concept of justification in the New Testament is a declaration that through trust in the blood of Jesus as the ultimate provider of righteousness and not our own efforts, not through psychology or enhanced self-image or the standards of the community or family, we stand unashamed at last before God. It is he who bestows honor.

Next time we will look at the two principal ways the church can seize the moment in our culture to be the light in darkness and the salt we should be. Until then, keep thinking.

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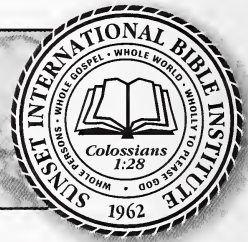
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Welcome Aboard

Last month we shared with you the format and organizational changes that are forthcoming for *Carolina Christian*. In addition, we are excited about two new additions to our staff. First, we welcome Richard Boese, who becomes the new Business Manager. Richard and his wife, Patty, and son, Alex, live in Lewisville, NC. They worship with the Yadkinville Church of Christ. As Business Manager Richard will be serving as Treasurer and will also be in charge of subscription services.

We are also pleased with the addition of Russ Jurek, who will be

editing a family column each month (beginning with this issue) called "Families Matter." Russ preaches for the North Augusta Church of Christ in North Augusta, SC. Russ had previously served the church there as family minister. He is, in fact, a licensed family therapist and will be writing from the perspective of one who knows whereof he speaks!

We welcome them both to the *Carolina Christian* family and look forward to working with them for the glory of God and the building up of His people.

GREENSBORO, NC...

The *Friendly Avenue Church of Christ* installed three additional elders on Sunday, November 5. *David Galloway, Dean Malson* and *Vic Moran* join the existing elders as shepherds.

MARIETTA, SC...

Barry Thompson has been selected as the new Chairman of the Board of Directors for *Palmetto Bible Camp*. *Thompson's* address is 901 Lake Street, North Augusta, SC 29841. He succeeds *Dan Knight* of *Lugoff, South Carolina*, who served as board chairman for eight years.

AIKEN, SC... The *Northside Church of Christ* has been meeting in Aiken since February, 2000.

Jerry Rosier is serving as the evangelist. His address is 1059 Butler Circle, Aiken SC 29801.

COLUMBIA, SC... The 57th Annual *Carolina Lectures* will be hosted by the *Saint Andrews Road Church of Christ* in Columbia, April 1-5, 2001. The theme will be "God's Leaders".

MOCKSVILLE, NC...

About 100 men from across the Carolinas gathered at *Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center* for the annual *Carolina*

Men's Leadership Retreat October 27-28. *Jim McQuiggan* was the speaker.

STATESVILLE, NC...

The *Abilene Church of Christ* is presently looking for a full-time preacher. The congregation describes itself as "small but dedicated to growth and service." The facilities include a 300 seat auditorium, large fellowship hall, and a four bedroom home for the preacher's family. If interested, send a resume and salary requirements to: *Abilene Church of Christ*, c/o *Robert English*, 259 Sain Rd., Statesville, NC 28625

God's Healing

Last month we discussed a

David Kneip

healing—I think that's the easiest place to start.

little bit about how God has made us all priests in his kingdom. He started out at Mount Sinai and kept it up in 1 Peter, and that's not something that has changed with us – we're still his priests. Part of that job is bringing God to the people of the world. We teach and preach, often in more subtle ways than we realize. It is hard, though, to do that sometimes, right? We don't know what to say, or we don't know how people will react. Well, let's talk about something that I think can encourage us a little in this regard – the other part of our job description.

If part of our role as God's priests is to bring God to the people, then the other half is bringing the people to God. We follow Jesus in his ministry by teaching and preaching (last month) but also by healing (see Matthew 4-9 for a little crash course that direction). Now, I know that our brotherhood has traditionally not felt very good about the idea of us healing, but we do believe that God heals people – spiritually, physically, and emotionally – because we pray for it all the time. And I think that's good. But I also think that we can join God in his work by bringing people to him, so that he can do that crazy healing thing that he's so good at.

All right. So how does this work? Let's talk about spiritual

How can we work with God to spiritually heal people? Well, we believe that Jesus died for our sins, right? We can tell the story of how we were saved, but we can also tell about the people that were influential in our lives. We won't ever know how many people have been praying for us in our lives—friends, family, church, etc.. They interceded for us. And we can do the same with other people. Praying for other people is huge!

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And guess what? Prayer doesn't just mean that we tell God about these struggling people, and that's the end of it. Nope. Prayer changes us. Let me say that one more time. Prayer changes us.

Praying for other people opens our eyes more fully to the hurts of the world. Praying helps us to be more aware of others' pain. Prayer makes us more sensitive and better listeners. And that can open amazing doors to helping people through spiritual struggle. The key is to be with people, just like God is (read what "Immanuel" means in Matthew 1:23).

What about physical healing? Yeah, I know; this is a little weirder, but we can do some work here. People have physical needs—I hope you won't argue with me about that. It's not hard for us to do a good job feeding hungry people or making sure cold people are warm. And that's really good. But we can also work with sickness. Our God is a God who heals; I'm sure we can all tell stories about somebody you know or heard of (or maybe even you!) whom God has healed. But listen: even encouraging people to go to the doctor so that they can get better is a way of joining God in his work. I mean, not all of God's healing is out of the blue – he does

use doctors and nurses! Encourage people to take care of their bodies and to take care of their friends.

Finally, there's emotional healing. This is tough, guys, but it's huge today. How many friends of

yours struggle with eating disorders? Have just lost a family member or a close friend? Or have fights in the family? Guess what? You've got people who're hurting emotionally, and God wants to heal them.

Emotional brokenness, unfortunately, often leads to spiritual and physical pain as well, and the people of our world need to know that God can meet their needs.

Loneliness, identity crises, pride, anger, insecurity—all of these and more, God can deal with. And he often does it through us.

We can do it, guys. We can join God in his work. I believe he wants to use us. So take comfort from this, please. It is hard, but be courageous. Pray for other people. Get involved in their lives. Don't be afraid to ask difficult, God-centered questions, and don't be afraid to tell others what God has done for you and what he can do for them.

Remember, we're already the people and priests of God.

Let's get to work.

***"Prayer
changes
us."***

God's Pyramid.....

M

ost of
us at

Russ Jurek

one time or another have run into a "pyramid scheme." You probably know about those companies built on recruiting people to buy into the company. Each person starts out at the bottom level usually as sales persons. The person who recruited his friends, now has those people on a level under him. The recruiter encourages his recruits to do two things. Sell products and recruit their friends. The real money is not made in the area of sales, but in recruiting more people to sell for you. Each person that is recruited moves the original recruiter up another level. He is receiving a percentage of the sales of each person under him in the recruitment levels. It sounds like a good plan but it has one major flaw: the only people who really benefit from the pyramid scheme are those at the upper most levels. Those at the lower levels are usually left with a heavy investment in training and inventory and not much income to satisfy their dreams of becoming independently wealthy.

Let me tell you about another pyramid scheme that is most beneficial to families. This is not a "scheme" in the sense we often

think of as associated with trickery or deceit.

It is according to our friend Webster, referring to a "plan." You see, I believe God put together the first pyramid scheme and since it is His plan, if we follow it, it will work! Here's how God's pyramid scheme is designed. God wants us to seek a relationship with him as the most important priority in our lives as individuals. He has set his Son Jesus up to have the first place in our lives. Colossians 1:15-20. God has given us His Word as the manual to show us how to be reconciled to

and build a relationship with him. This relationship is at the pinnacle of the pyramid. Now the next level down in this pyramid is the marriage relationship. Under the marriage relationship are the relationships of parents and their children. Under this level may be extended family and friends and so on.

Unlike the man

made, "get rich quick" pyramid schemes that depend on profits flowing from the bottom up, God's plan has the benefits flowing downward. There is a trickle down affect in God's plan. Here how it works: When a husband and wife each are committed to building their individual relationship with God, it can't

Most marriage and family problems are the result of spiritual problems more than anything else."

help but build and strengthen their marriage relationship. Check out Ephesians 5:21-33. When their marriage is being built up and strengthened according to God's plan, this in turn can't help but build better parent/child relationships. See Ephesians 6:1-4. When things are going well on the home front, it can't help trickle down to all our other relationships as well.

We must keep in mind that the trickle down affect works both positively as well as negatively. In other words, if our relationship with God is not what it should be, it can't help but affect our marriage in a

negative way. If our marriage isn't centered on God and working well, our parent/child relationships will suffer likewise. If our family is not functioning according to God's plan because he is not at the top, the rest of our relationships will suffer as well.

I heard someone once say, "Most marriage and family problems are the result of spiritual problems more than anything else." I agree! If we will keep God at the top of our pyramid of life relationships, following his plan, our families can't help but grow stronger as his blessing trickle down!

Directory Nearing Completion

The 2001 Directory of Churches of Christ in the Carolinas is nearly complete. While we have not been able to keep our hoped for deadline of October 1, we believe the wait will be worthwhile. Great pains are being taken to make the directory as accurate and up to date as possible, and we appreciate your patience and understanding as we pursue those goals.

We would like to extend a special thanks to David Pharr, editor of the *Carolina Messenger*, for sharing with us church information he had already collected. That information has proved to be invaluable and we are greatly appreciative.

If you have any questions about the directory, or would like to order some, you can correspond by e-mail to: Or you can call (336) 679-8924.

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Cast All Your Care on the Lord

“

...Casting all

David Macy

Him, and He gives an unwavering promise to

your care upon Him; for He careth for you,” (1 Peter 5:7). No doubt there has been a time when you have carried such a heavy load (whether it be a bag of groceries, or whatever) that you felt your arms would break before you reached your destination. What a relief it would have been if someone had happened by, just at the right time, and said, “Give your load to me; I’ll gladly carry it a while and give you some rest.” All of God’s children have that kind of relief when sometimes the cares and burdens of life seem almost unbearable.

We can cast all our cares on our loving heavenly Father because He truly cares for us. He happily bears all our burdens and our sorrows, no matter what befall us. There is absolutely no reason for us to even attempt to shoulder the burden alone. The truth is that God wants to help us, has promised in His word to help us, and will help us when the need arises. Jesus reaffirmed God’s desire when He said, “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls; for I am meek and my burden is light,” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus, as well, lovingly invites all who are burdened down with heartaches and cares to come to

exchange rest for one’s heavy burdens. The yoke Jesus puts on His faithful disciples is light and quite easy to carry in vivid contrast to the heavy, often almost unbearable burdens Satan’s followers must carry daily—burdens of shame, burdens of regret, burdens of corruption, burdens of heart wrenching disease, and the burdens of both physical and spiritual death. A wise Christian doesn’t even attempt to bear the burdens of life alone. When he has a need or is in trouble, he turns without hesitation to God in prayer, and without fail, he receives the help or comfort he needs in God’s good time.

You see, when there is someone to cast all your cares on, life is so much sweeter and easier. The question is, do you have this? If you don’t, what are you waiting for? Do the smart thing and come to the Lord today. Believe in Him. Trust Him. Obey Him. Then every day, every hour, every minute you can cast each and every burden on the One who cares for you. No wonder we sing, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, O, what a foretaste of glory divine.”

David Macy preaches for the Murphy Church of Christ, Murphy, NC.

The Strength of the Lord

T

he citizens of
Feldkirch,

Peter Rode

Austria, didn't know what to do. Napoleon's massive army was preparing to attack. Soldiers had been spotted on the heights above the little town, which was situated on the Austrian border. A council of citizens was hastily summoned to decide whether they should try to defend themselves or display the white flag of surrender. It happened to be Easter Sunday, and the people had gathered in the local church building. The minister rose and said, "Friends, we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed. As this is the day of our Lord's resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our service as usual, and leave the matter in His hands. We know only our weakness, and not the power of God to defend us." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden peal of the bells, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the worship ended, the enemy broke camp and left.

Jesus claimed, "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me," (Matthew 28:18), and "...nothing is impossible with God," (Luke 1:27). We understand these things in our heads, but how well do we really translate this

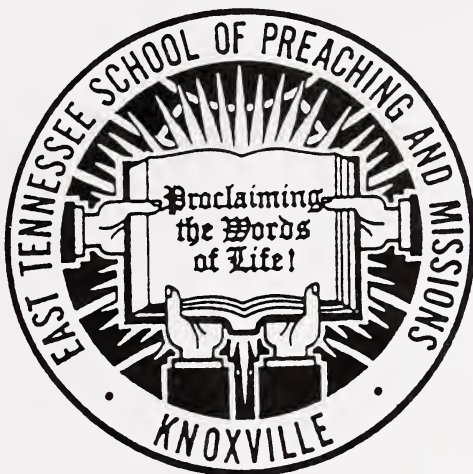
belief into real life?

Jesus is our provider, protector, and the one who gives us strength. He promised, "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We often forget the reality of what He can do and what He has already done, and we don't factor these realities into our lives. Even while acknowledging God's ability to give us a voice to speak, or the strength to stand, we so often fall back upon our own strength and our own understanding, and the end result is defeat and frustration. Faith has not been practiced.

Just think what might have happened had the citizens of Feldkirch not turned to God in simple trust. We are told in 1 Corinthians 1:27, "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." The torches of Gideon's army, the act of marching around Jericho, the church bells of a Feldkirch, Austria are all the weapons of warfare of a God who can crush the world with a thought. Elisha prayed for his servant boy's eyes to be opened, and when the

were, he saw "the hills full of horses and chariots of fire." Then he understood the prophet's words, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." We rob ourselves of what is

*"We often forget
the reality of
what He can do
and what He has
already done...."*



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available to us through our Lord when we try to do everything ourselves, and only as a last resort turn to Him for help. God wants us to learn of His ways so that we might find His strength in our lives. However, it will mean that we will have to unlearn much of what we have learned, and begin to think beyond what is simply tangible to the five senses. It's not easy, but that is the way of faith.

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength...He will be like a bush

in the wastelands...But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him...He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream..."

(Jeremiah 17:5-8). To increase our faith and hope we must put down our roots deep into the things of God, growing ever closer to Him. We must learn to depend on Him for all things.

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ in Greensboro, NC.

Integrity Matters

P

rofessional golfer
Steve Elkington

Johnny Melton

won for the first time on the PGA tour back in 1990 at the Greater Greensboro Open. Two weeks later he played in the USF&G Classic in New Orleans. He didn't win, but the official results of the tournament showed him scoring a 79 on the final round, good enough for a tie for 21st place and \$10,000 in prize money.

When Steve read those official results in the newspaper two days after the tournament, he was surprised. He knew that he had not scored 79 on the final round—it was really an 80. When he checked his scorecard he discovered that he had signed an incorrect scorecard for the round. Rather than keeping his mouth shut and taking his chances on getting away with it, Steve contacted PGA tour officials.

So what are the consequences for 'fessing up? Just a drop down a Carolina Christian

place or two in the standings and collect a few hundred dollars

less? Actually, under PGA rules, signing an incorrect scorecard means disqualification from the tournament and forfeiture of all prize money!

The Wise Man observed:

"The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out," (Proverbs 10:9).

"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity," (Proverbs 11:3).

"Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner," (Proverbs 13:6).

Integrity matters. Not just in golf, but in life.

Johnny Melton was editor of Carolina Christian from 1992-1995. He currently preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS.

Hope Realized

“**T**

he stockings
were hung

by the chimney with care in hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there.” Not only do we expect that Saint Nick will make his long-awaited visit, but the dinner will satisfy the hardest to please, Uncle Charles will have metamorphosed from the critical Scrooge to a caring and devoted benefactor, Aunt Lilly and Uncle Joe will not continue their annual resurrection of the hatchet, and hope for the rebirth of the family spirit reigns.

In Celia Falicov's *Family Transitions*, Christmas and its anticipation are referred to as a psychological pregnancy which begins in October when we are warned there are only 90 shopping days left. The authors say, “The nest is symbolically refeathered and special food prepared for the arrival of the new symbolic baby,” the long awaited expectation of family completing itself—wholly protecting, loving, and nurturing.

Other comments in Falicov's book remind the reader that joy does occur on the festive occasion, yet is tinged with an edge of sadness, or “a feeling of something lost or missed.” The authors call it a “desperate feeling that there may not be enough new hope.” Somehow we may leave the gathering, still empty, our expectations unrealized. These writers conclude, “And always, at the end there is the loneliness. The warmth of renewed closeness is replaced by the pain of distance or indifference.”

What these authors describe smacks of the pain that we each experience everyday. Christian counselor Larry Crabb says we were all created to live in a perfect world with perfect relationships with the Father and perfect relationships with one another. But that reality was lost in the garden. It will never exist here, not even on a snow-blanketed day in December.

When I sense people looking for that wholeness, I am reminded of John 7 when the Jews were celebrating the Feast

Mikal Frazier

of Tabernacles. There with Jesus in their midst they

were aching for the same balm for their hearts. Historians tell us that an uncommanded ceremony had become customary on the last day of the Feast. The priest would take a golden vial and fill it with water from the fount of Siloam. With much celebration the vial was carried through the gate of the temple and the water mixed with wine and then poured on the sacrifice on the altar.

It is believed that this custom began from an improper understanding of Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” The originators of the ritual were searching for that promised wholeness. Jesus proclaims to the people that He is the only answer for their thirst and ours. And then He promises the Comforter, our complete source of protection, nurture, and care. And if we will allow Him, we can have a holiday of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,” (Galatians 5:22).

I suggest that we approach the holiday with the perspective of Luke 6: giving love, giving encouragement, not looking for anything in return. Then we will be “sons of the Most High.” When we are filled with the Spirit, He enables us to do just that. If we are filled with Him, what emptiness could there be. Again we are reminded that nothing of this world can truly satisfy.

If we will remember to look to the cross, remembering that everyone around that holiday feast can be made whole at the cross, then as our hearts overflow with gratitude, we will experience His unspeakable joy.

This article originally appeared in the All About Families Newsletter (December 23, 1996) and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to: Mikal Frazier is a licensed family therapist.

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